PEOPLE WITH BRAINS SHOULD TURN TO PAGE 640.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 389. FOR WEEK ENDING JUNE 13TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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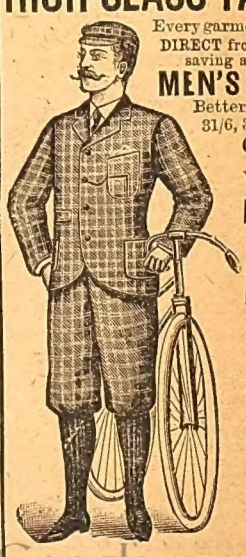

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 389.] For the Week ending June 13th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

CHAPTER I.

IT was Christmas Eve in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and sixty, when I first set foot within the mining camp of "Bungalow Bottom," situated on the most westerly border of California.

About three months previous to this important epoch, my father—a man of great principle and little mercy—had turned me out of doors in the most ignominiously neck and crop manner conceivable. Considering this, I could not doubt I was a very bad lot. True, I had never disgraced his house that *he* knew of, and moreover it is equally true, I had never disgraced any individual that *I* knew of.

But there it was.

"Go!" my father had said. "You won't work!"

This probably is the only mistake my father ever made in the whole course of his natural life. I would have worked had Nature adapted me so to do, but unfortunately she had not. Therein she wronged herself, my father, and me, and then burdened me with the blame. I did not condemn her on this account, for I am one of those enviable persons who believe that all things conspire, etc. One thing, however, struck me as being very remarkable, and that was—that I had never bathed in that tide of men's affairs, which if taken at the flood, etc.

On the day of my departure, my father had urged in response to my objections that my tide *had* flowed, and that I had failed to launch my lugger. This, he said, was when I was clerking at a retaining fee of seventy pounds per annum; but I couldn't see it that way at all. Hence his anger.

"Go!" he commanded. "Go away! Go anywhere! Go to the dogs at once, for that is your ultimate destination. You are of no use to man nor——" here he mentioned a supernatural Someone, for whom I entertain an honest and profound regard. Dutifully believing his latter statement, I proceeded to go to the dogs, choosing the route viâ Paris. Although generally the quickest way for a single young gentleman, it proved the reverse in my case; for something occurred there which laid the foundation of my narrative, influencing me at the same time to seek my fate by a more circuitous highway.

I was walking late one night amongst the deserted slums of the memorial city of Paris, when I was arrested by the sound of singing, at once sublime and earthly. It was too voluminous to suggest those spectral things that whisper to the sleeping poet, and it was too absolutely perfect to suggest anything so common as a prima donna of the earth—it was as little earthly as could be.

Lengthening my strides, I was thinking to pursue it when suddenly it burst upon me in all the beauty of it's thrilling magnificence. To my utter astonishment—though why, I can't say—the singer appeared before me, a veritable beggar. In the dim dark night, I could not determine her nationality, but I could see the threadbare clothing and unshod feet. I could see the voluptuous contour of her figure, despite the desperate endeavour of her ill-fitting garments to conceal it, and I could see the motionless human bundle at her breast, warmed by the fire of her gleaming eyes.

Seeing me, she stopped; both in her singing and passage. Likewise did I.

After a momentary hesitation I spoke to her in French, upon which she burst into a shriek of laughter, and whether she intended it or not, succeeded in mystifying me entirely.

Thinking perhaps that my accent was bad, or that my phrasing was badly turned, I threw all my genius and

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education into another effort, but without avail. She merely repeated her performance in a higher stave.

Struck by a really clever idea, I attacked every tongue of which I was student, but upon each occasion her laugh encompassed more octaves, and eventually she had me spluttering amid the ruins of my unsanctified vocabulary.

Had I not heard her singing, I should have thought her dumb or hungry when she approached me, and made the very equivocal movement of wobbling her finger about inside her mouth. As it was I inferred she wished to suggest ignorance of my meaning.

Coming close up to me, she held her little hand palm upwards, nodding in its direction with a vigour that would have made *my* head ache for months, had I chosen to attempt the feat. Gathering that she wanted money, I placed a coin in her hand, and then, turning down the covering of her bundle, I kissed the child.

An irresistible shudder shook me with frightful force as I realised it was stone dead. Momentarily forgetting myself, I sprang back, crying loudly in English: "Your child is dead!"

Another burst of her inane laughter greeted my remark as she passed on.

Gradually the laughter resolved into the transcendent singing, and burning at the heart, I went on my way musing.

From that moment the course of my life was changed, and I was victim—as I afterwards discovered—to that subtle and soul absorbing whim—love.

The next month it was that I altered my route, seeking my destiny via California.

The singer appeared before me, a veritable beggar.

Some may wonder at my leaving Paris at all, being as I said before, in love. But then, at that time I was not heedful of the fact.

Anyway, 'tis the truth I'm telling, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, etc.

CHAPTER II.

As before stated, it was Christmas eve in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and sixty, when I reached my journey's end. It was on the morning of the eve, so that before the miners of "Bungalow Bottom" had pitched down their shovels in varying disgust and satisfaction, I was instituted as lodger in a highly popular and respectable canteen, to which they invariably resorted after business hours.

Wishing to place myself upon friendly terms with everyone (the only constant idea of my life), I connived with the host to afford my future fraternity a jolly reception.

Beer and beef, punch and pie, bent the benches beneath their indigestible will.

One by one the diggers lounged in; some on their feet, others on *my* feet; but all more or less hearty.

They looked at the benches, then at the landlord, and finally at me. Some of the comparatively hearty ones invoked silent blessings on my head—or at least I supposed so. Some of the superlatively hearty ones grasped me and shook me, and seemed like to weep on my neck.

At length, when all were seated, one gawky wag volunteered the information that "Romeo of Russia wasn't here!"

Simultaneous with this assertion, the door opened, admitting the most distinguished-looking man I had ever seen during the whole spell of my existence.

Knowing something of Californian mannerisms and customs, I had expected to see some shrivelled old fossil, either idiotic or drunk. As it was, the man before me came as a brilliant revelation.

The humourous designation of "Romeo" was distinctly appropriate in its application, and of his hailing from Russia there could exist no manner of doubt. Although arrayed in the conventional mining costume, he bore indisputable traces of high breeding and quality.

Dressed consistently I could have conceived him a head amongst royalty. His face was naturally hairless, an omission Nature had rectified by a lavish abundance on the head. He walked with eyes fixed upon the ground, maintaining a semblance of stolid inscrutability.

I could not, dared not, approach him, or ask him to accept of my bounty. Once when his eye caught mine, he started, and his gaze swept me from crown to toe. Then taking his mug of liquor, he betook himself into a corner, and languished in the shade. He never vouchsafed a word to anybody, but remained with downcast eyes passively fixed upon the floor. My interest had left the company, and as anguish is embodied by emotion, so was my mind entrapped by Romeo of Russia. At that time I could not determine whether his power was the fascination of madness or of physical beauty and bearing; but anyway he flung a mystic spell about me I could not escape.

By this time the miners had abandoned their different benches, and were now seated circuitously around the stove. I fancied their laughs were quieter, and the jests less coarse, since the entrance of the Russian. Presently—and for the first time—this individual perceptibly moved. He shook himself, beat his temples with clenched hands, rolled his eyes about with his fore-

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fingers, and disentangled himself generally. Raising himself altogether, he took a seat in the very midst of his brethren. He had been drinking heavily, and his eyes were sullen beneath a yellowish film.

He started speaking as it were unconsciously, and his low musical tones contrasted strangely with his peculiar taint of the western twang.

"Pards!" he commenced. "To-night I'm goin' to tell yer all about myself an' the mousetrap. I've a reason for so doin', as yer will afterwards diskivver."

The "mousetrap" I subsequently learnt was his poetical name for fate.

"I'm goin' ter divulge ter yer keepin' a secret thet none of yer have ever dreamt on!"

Here the gawky wag above referred to arose with significant haste, accompanied by a croak, and left the saloon. The other miners took heavy swigs of liquor, concluding by sweeping their hands across their mouths, with a noise like a score of kettles boiling over. Not a man spoke.

"Y'all remember that gal, Pamela the Pagan."

They intimated that they did remember.

"I've often let drop snatches of her hist'ry as connected with mine, but not one o' yer knows as much about that same connexion as would kivver the brain of a fly."

That the company knew little on this head was evidenced by its smart attention. Dull of comprehension though it was, it nevertheless detected some unwonted animation in Romeo, and each man intuitively knew something unusual was coming. None attempted to quit the room, and each suffered himself to be chained with awakening interest. In ever heightening tones, with vacant stare, but reddening brow, Romeo of Russia resumed:

"Y'all call me Romeo, because I loved that gal. I don't mind that. My langidge an' my likes is just as yer own. My langidge so, cos I knoo no English, but what I larnt here. Yes, I loved that gal from the first. I allus loved her, an' I love her now, whenever thet red mist leaves my mem'ry. But pards, it's growin' redder an' redder every day."

Here he swayed like one in a baffled frenzy, and in the mysterious zest of his agitation, he stopped, running his fingers wildly through his hair. A dozen mugs were extended towards him, and he quelled his fearful fire with the contents of one. Afterwards, he continued, coherently and jointedly:

"That gal," he said, "I met once before. It was in Russia. Who she was, or where she came from, I never knoo. I only know that I loved her on fust sight, from which time my whole self became wrapped, so ter say, in her. It was only a brief intervoo that I had with her, an I saw her no more, until one day she came to my father's house with a child in her arms. She said—well, never mind. Who the child akchully belonged to, don't matter to enyone here.

"Upon that my father kicked me out of house an' home in a puffek temper o' passion, an' I came here.

"Likewise y'all know, over an' above wot I'm telling, I met her here, shortly after I came; but none on yer knows wot passed between us.

"Recollectin' rightly you'll likewise remember how that same gal could sing. Y'all thought she wor an angel; I know yer did, wot with her little harp, an' her lovely voice.

"After that, yer know, the sensation when my sister came to see me, all the way from Russia, trying to get me t' return, an' receive my father's parding.

Taking his mug of liquor, he betook himself into a corner.

"But I says, pards"—and his voice rose higher—"yer *don't* know as how the Pagan got jealous of my own sister, an' addishunally, yer don't know as how my beautiful unsu'pektin' sister loved her. Yer don't know that one night the devil himself seized the lovely Pagan, fillin' her mind with all the wickedness of the shades.

"That awful night"—he went on with growing fire—"them two were together. I was a sittin' dreamy like, in another room, listenin' to my sister playin' the harp, while Pamela sang.

"I saw their two shadders on the flimsy curtins between us, an' I heard the Pagan say:

"'Let's do the "Red Assignation"!'

"This latter, pards, was a piece of music—descriptive so ter say.

"Her imaginashun of other worlds couldn't come nigh it. It was supernat'ral, heavenly, murderous, unearthly, unhuman, an' poetic, all in one.

"I was lost like. They played an' played an' played, until I b'lieve I lost my wits.

"When evenchully I came to, the music had stopped, an' I started up. *Now* pards, mark yer—mark yer, I say, there was only *one* shadder on the curtin, an' that dretful still. It was my sister's.

"Alarmed at the awful quiet, I parted the curtins an' went in to her,

"Oh, boys! There was a sight ter stab the very seein' from yer eyes. There was a sight at which an angel might have shrieked, an' stiffened like death itself. It was a sight which put a tongue in every thought of

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horror, an' deafened my senses with the noise of its hideousness.

"My poor sister lay on the floor, lifeless. A great red wound lay gaping hungry on her breast, eating its lovely whiteness with its crimson fangs. A fearful long knife still shivered about in her heavenly heart, mocking my pain so ter say with its devilish nods. In addishun to all this, I noticed that her finger tips, and the veins up her arms, were charged with a deep and bulky purple colour.

"Then I looked at the harp, and touched it. The strings were damp, and sort o' very sharp.

"Yer know when I was ill, pards? Well that wasn't so much the shock of the sight I saw, as the dampness of that infernal instrument.

"The only thing I wonder at is, that she had done it twice over, so ter say: the harp or the wound would have been enough to do anyone, even ef they'd been more than mortal.

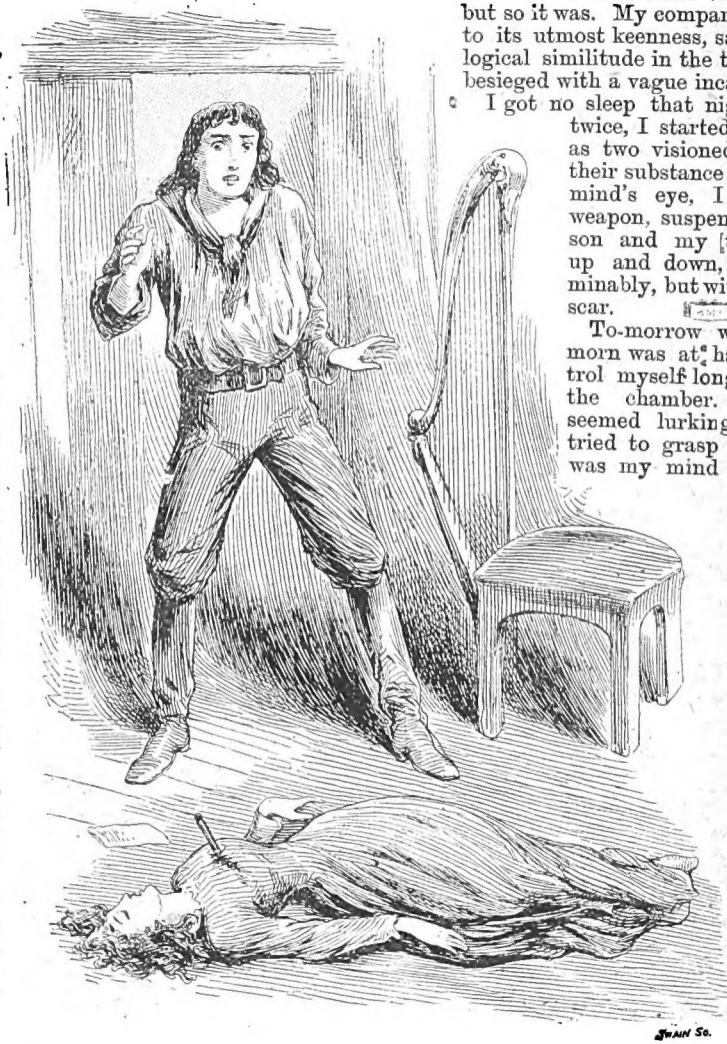
"Through all this I loved her—I couldn't help it; but there are times—well, never mind—she wor the mousetrap and I wor the mouse; but I ain't dead yet, am I?"

We signified a corroboration of this belief, and he continued with intensified power.

"Now p'raps yer a wonderin' why I have told yer this after keepin' silent so long! Wait a minit.

"By the side o' my dead sister, I found a bit o' paper, writ on in Russian. There wasn't much wordin'—only,

"'Christmas day, 1860.



"My poor sister lay on the floor, lifeless."

"That's why I tell yer now, pards. To-morrow's the day identical, an' I feel somethin's a hangin' over me like. What it is I don't know—I don't want to: it's awful, an' I am afeerd. Don't none o' yer touch me; don't speak ter me; but watch me, pards, for God's sake watch me!"

By this time his voice had risen to a perfect shriek, and, writhing from his seat, he fell face downwards to the floor, weeping like a child.

As one man the company rose without a word, left its mugs unemptied, and departed.

CHAPTER III.

I SOUGHT my chamber, beset with feelings I dare not describe. The Russian's painful narrative awoke in me a mysterious consciousness of some personal connection.

The woman whom he had described hung prominently on my thoughts, and somehow the likeness persistently blended itself with that of the strange unaccountable being I had met in Paris, carrying the dead child. Why this should have been so I could not imagine, but so it was. My comparative faculty, whetted to its utmost keenness, saw at least a psychological similitude in the two women, and I was besieged with a vague incalculable dread.

I got no sleep that night. Dozing once or twice, I started upright in my bed, as two visioned women commingled their substance and vanished. In my mind's eye, I saw a becrimsoned weapon, suspended between my person and my thoughts. It flashed up and down, wounding me interminably, but without physical pain or scar.

To-morrow was the day and the morn was at hand. Unable to control myself longer, I arose and paced the chamber. Nightly influences seemed lurking in every corner. I tried to grasp them, but no sooner was my mind about to encompass them, than they vanished: remaining impalpable as before.

Then, and not till then, did I realise the vast consuming volume of my passion for the woman I had met in Paris. My mind was ablaze. Each frenzied thought throbbed like lava through my brain, until I conceived it falling away, dissolved in the hissing current.

As the first dreary streaks of daylight came, I went out. Stealing about the camp like a wolf, I went to the door of every hut and listened.

Generally a deathly quietness reigned. At last, bent upon a rapid walk, I reached the extreme outskirts of the village, when suddenly my attention was arrested by a low moaning. Listening intently, I soon recognised the tones of Romeo of Russia, proceeding from a low, dilapidated shed before me. Selecting a hole in the most shaded corner of the boarding, I peered in.

The Russian was on his knees directly facing me. In the earthen floor he had scraped a large hollow, at the bottom of which lay embedded a rusty something I soon determined to be a harp. By his side lay a long, hideous

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knife, corroded with a substance I dared not think upon twice. Nearly sickened I turned away, pressing my hand to my forehead and trying to think collectedly.

The camp was stirring as I went back to my quarters. I tried to eat, but the attempt was a miserable failure; nothing could tempt me. Then I ordered some brandy, and under the comforting influences of this, I made a great determination.

"Woman or fiend," my spirit cried, "I love her still!" Upon this, I made rapid way to the diggings. Yes, there was the Russian working away as calmly and abstractedly as he had entered the saloon the night before.

Other miners, although it was Christmas, worked silently beside him. There was no noise, no coarse jest, no anything but work, work, work. Each man seemed impressed with something untold.

Impelled by my awful anxiety I hurried to the coach station. The weather was awful. Hail and sleet fell steadily and persistently. Burning within, and cold as death without, I waited on and on. Wet through and shivering I waited until night fell; aye and long after that.

The station was deserted: not a soul being in sight notwithstanding the fact that the coach was long overdue.

Seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven o'clock.

Half-past.

And then in the distance I heard a rumbling of wheels. With the faint refracted lights, the coach dashed up, bearing one solitary passenger, and that a woman closely veiled.

As one the weapons descended.

A shriek—a whoop—a hoarse cry, and the coach was gone. A great inconceivable thrill swept through me as the solitary woman brushed by me in the direction of the camp.

In a dozen strides I was at her side, with one hand upon her arm. With the other, and without ceremony, I tore off her veil.

Imagine my feelings then. Imagine my feelings upon finding my terrible premonition fulfilled.

It was she—the idol of my whole being—but how ghastly white! Her eyes flashed fiercely upon me, aggravating my every pulse to madness. Little wonder Romeo had fallen.

"Woman! Don't go—don't go!" I whispered. "You don't know what awaits you. Turn back whilst you have time—for God's sake turn back!"

Again those wondrous eyes flashed fiercely upon me, and muttering angrily, she passed on.

In another instant, an instant rife with all the madness of agony, I was beside her again.

"Fool!" I hissed. "Do you hear me? Don't go, I tell you. Treachery lurks in every breath of God's air to-night. Turn back! Come with me."

Again I laid my heavy, burning hand upon her arm, but with a sound more like the hiss of a serpent than the cry of a human being, she wrested herself away and literally flew into the mist. With a furtive pang of anguish I pursued her. She was upon the borders of the camp before I overtook her. This time I placed myself before her, exerting all my strength in the abandon of my love.

Catching her by the wrist again, I literally shrieked: "Out of the love I bear you, I urge you not to go further."

"You *shall* not—before heaven——!"

In less than a trice, she had a glittering weapon lifted high above me. It quivered on its downward course.

Simultaneously a figure, looking blacker than this blackest of nights, glided from out the shadow like the prong of a colossal serpent. It writhed swiftly between my breast and the glittering knife, at the same time poising its own corroded blade.

As one the weapons descended, thrust with a vigour equalling the trinity of Hate and Love and Despair.

A shriek which split the heavens like a thunderblast flew upwards, as the knives crashed to their hilts in the bosoms of Pamela the Pagan and Romeo of Russia.

NINEPENCE contributed to our FRESH AIR FUND will give a day in the Country to one poor child. All sums received will be acknowledged in the columns of *P. W.*

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Two Wedding Rings.

SHARP and loud came the sound of the postman's knock, cutting the frigid winter air like a knife-blade.

I started up from the sofa, where I had been dreaming over the morning paper, with a cheery crackle of the wood fire close beside me, and the scent of my morning coffee steaming gratefully up from the chased-silver equipage on the little round table.

(The bachelor's mode of life is not altogether without its advantages, after all.)

"Mrs. Metcalfe," I called out, putting my head over the stair-rail (which hadn't been dusted that morning; boarding-house stair-rails never do get dusted until noon if you have ever observed it), "is there anything for me?"

An ominous silence. I knew as well as if I were on the spot that the landlady's daughter was reading my post-cards, holding my letters up between her eye and the light, and indulging in other proceedings peculiar to the genus "landlady's daughter."

"I say," I reiterated, throwing a little spice of exasperation into my accent, "is there anything for me?"

"Coming, sir! Coming!" And Miss Melinda Metcalfe shuffled upstairs with my correspondence on a japanned tray.

"Is there any news?" said I sarcastically as I took my letter, my two post-cards and my newspaper.

"Sir?" said Miss Melinda.

"I didn't know but that you were opening my post," said I blandly.

"Oh, sir, I shouldn't think of such a thing!"

And Miss Melinda went downstairs, tossing her head like an enraged Shetland pony.

One card from my tailor, to notify me of his change of business residence; one from Louis Durande to tell me that he could not keep a certain engagement with me, and a letter from Percy Wyncote, who had warmed his slippers at the same college fire with me scarcely three years ago.

"Dear Belton," so his epistle ran, "I claim your congratulations. I am to be married next week to the sweetest girl the sun ever shone on. There's surprise number one for you. And I wish you'd go to Goldluck and Glitterman's and get the wedding ring, size inclosed on a bit of paper. There's surprise number two. Seriously, old fellow, it will do me a great favour, for business matters here are complicated in such a way that I cannot hope to get down to London a day before the event. And of course I know that I can trust your taste and judgment equally with my own. Have the words 'Helen, 1896,' engraved on the inside, and please send by express without delay.

"Ever yours faithfully,
"PERCY WYNCOTE.

"P.S.—She is an angel.

"P.P.S.—She's for all the world the counterpart of that lovely girl on the cover of this month's *Pearson's*."

"Well," said I to myself, laying down my old chum's rapturous letter, "here's a pretty commission for a bachelor. An angel, is she? I don't believe she's any more angelic than Pauline Brookes. But every man thinks his own goose a swan. I pity the poor fellow I'm sure; he's clearly in a state of glamour that make him see everything *couleur de rose*. But I'm not one to desert a friend at a pinch—I'll buy his miserable wedding-ring with the greatest pleasure in life."

So I locked my desk, put on my seal-trimmed overcoat, and went straightway to Goldluck and Glitterman's.

Jones was behind the counter. I knew Jones; I had bought a gold bracelet of him for Pauline Brookes six months ago. Jones was a dapper little fellow, with a stiffly-waxed moustache, a cameo scarf-pin and hair bedewed with some ambrosial perfume or other.

"Wedding-rings, if you please," said I, plunging *in medias res*, without loss of time. "Here's the size," producing my slip of paper.

"Any inscription, sir?" questioned Jones, assuming so preternaturally knowing an aspect that I could cheerfully have pitched him in among the plated ware in the big glass show-case behind him.

"Helen," said I brusquely, "1896."

"H'Emma, sir?" Jones put his hand behind his ear.

"Helen!" I bawled out, painfully conscious that the eyes of the three pretty girls who were looking at turquoise lockets at the counter beyond were upon me.

"Very pretty name," simpered Jones, as he wrote down the order. "Any particular style?"

"Simple and solid," said I; "that's all."

"Yes, sir. It shall be attended to at once," said Jones.

"Shall I send it to your residence or——"

"I'll call for it to-morrow," said I.

"Pardon me, Mr. Belton," cried old Mr. Glitterman, who had overheard a portion of our colloquy, "but it wouldn't be taking a liberty to inquire whether you intend to keep house or board——"

"What?" ejaculated I.

"To keep house or board?" reiterated Mr. Glitterman. "Because in the former case we should esteem it a favour to supply the silver and tableware."

I muttered some not particularly complimentary

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answer and went out of the shop, closing the door behind me with some emphasis.

* * * * *

"Going to be married, eh, old chap?" said Sniffins, familiarly thrusting his elbow into my side, as I strolled into the Monico for my lunch that day.

"No!" said I, taking up the carte.

"Oh, come, don't deny the soft impeachment," said Sniffins, with a wink.

"What has put such an idea as that into your head?" demanded I, somewhat indignantly.

"Name of Helen," said Sniffins, with an idiotic giggle. "Waiter, *pâté de foie gras* here! Let's drink her health, Belton, when——"

At this stage I pretended to see someone whom I knew at an opposite table, and bolted across the room.

* * * * *

Old Mr. Jessup was trotting across Piccadilly Circus, as I came out, with a brown silk umbrella under his arm.

"Eh?" said Mr. Jessup, turning upon me the moony glare of two spectacled eyes. "What's this I hear about you, my dear young friend? Accept my congratulations. Matrimony is always a blessed estate, and——"

"Oh, yes, I don't doubt it, sir," I hurriedly interrupted, "but—a—there's some mistake about it——"

"Miss what did you say," said old Mr. Jessup beamingly. "Call round this evening and tell us all about it, there's a good fellow. I haven't time to listen just now!"

I could have torn my hair with rage. Mr. Jessup was Pauline Brooke's uncle and guardian, and I knew that my chances in that direction would be all off if once the fatal story of the wedding ring got to Pauline's ears.

I hurried up Regent Street mentally gnashing my teeth, and in my impetuous haste had nearly stumbled over Pauline herself, just coming out of a florist's with a tiny *boutonnière* of violets in her hand.

"Pauline!" cried I rapturously. But Pauline drew back the least little distance in the world, thereby putting an invisible barrier between us that froze me like an icicle.

"Dear me, Mr. Belton, is it you?" said Pauline. "I congratulate you I am sure!"

"Upon what?" I demanded, growing desperate.

"Upon your approaching marriage, to be sure!" said Pauline, with a smile like auroral lights hovering over a snowbank.

"But I'm not going to be married," protested I.

"Oh, excuse me, pray! Gentlemen do not usually buy wedding rings without a purpose," interposed Pauline. "Only I should think you might have paid such old friends as we are the compliment of some slight intimation of your impending marriage."

"Pauline," said I—"Miss Brookes—hear me. There is only one woman in the world I would care to marry, and she stands before me now!"

Pauline's lips quivered—the tears sparkled into her eyes.

"Mr. Belton," said she, "you may regard all this as a very bad joke, but surely, surely, it is not necessary to add any more insult to it——"

"Do you mean that you don't believe me?"

"How can I believe you?" retorted she.

Driven to a sort of frenzy, I dragged Wyncote's letter from my pocket.

"Pauline," said I, "read that and you have a read solution of the mystery of the wedding ring."

Her face cleared up as she glanced over the contents of poor Wyncote's ecstatic missive.

"Poor fellow!" said she. "He's very much in love, isn't he?"

"Not half so much as I am," said I. And then in the smilax-bordered shadow of the florist's I pressed my suit. "Dear Pauline, let me order another wedding ring?"

"For whom?" demanded my lady-love.

"For you. I have loved you this long time, but I never had the courage to avow my love before, dear Pauline."

"Hush!" said Pauline. "We musn't stand talking here."

"I won't stir a step until you answer me."

"What shall I say?" hesitated Pauline.

"Say yes."

I ordered the duplicate wedding ring that very night. Pauline said it was too soon, but I quoted the ancient proverb: "Delays are dangerous." And we are to be married in a month. And if it hadn't been for the providential interruption of Wyncote's wedding ring, I might still have been shivering on the brink of an unspoken proposal. "Blessed be wedding rings," say I.

JULIA SCHLOMM.

To read "Secrets of the Courts of Europe" in this month's "PEARSON'S MAGAZINE" is to arm yourself with knowledge concerning the private lives of European Royalty calculated to make your less enlightened friends feel small.

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Merely A Dog

"WILL you come and dine with me to-morrow, Gregory?"

"Thanks, very much, old fellow; but the sixteenth of this month is always observed by me as a solemn day. It is the anniversary of Jack's death, you know."

"Jack! Might I ask who Jack was?"

"My little fox-terrier. I thought you knew."

"A dog. Do you mean to say seriously that you keep the anniversary of a fox-terrier's death as a fast day?"

"And why not? Jack's life was sacrificed for his master's. To his death I owe my existence. Shall I not at least keep his memory green by setting aside one day out of the year to his honour? Shall I tell you the story?"

"Yes; I should like to hear it."

"Well, then, we must go back ten years. I was then a clerk in the employ of a firm called Wilkins and Stokes. They were merchants in the Portugese trade—first class people, and, as the banks say, 'good for anything they might undertake.' But there came a panic in the trade. Some big firms in Lisbon and Oporto failed, and some of the leading London houses were dragged down with them. It became known that Wilkins and Stokes had become involved and were in difficulties, their credit was damaged, they were pressed on all hands, and finally driven into the bankruptcy court.

"My berth had been a good one, and I had fondly hoped that it was as secure as anything can be in the City. I had been a thriftless fool, and when I suddenly found myself thrown out of employment, I had nothing whatever to fall back upon. My parents were dead, and my nearest relative was an aunt somewhere in the country, a woman of slender means, of whom I knew very little. I sought employment diligently from morning till night, but without avail. The special knowledge that I had acquired of Portuguese business was of no use to me in the state of the trade, and there were hundreds of clerks possessed of a general knowledge of office routine, who were ready to snap up, at a moment's notice, any berth that might fall vacant.

"Month after month went on, and I was still out of work. I had borrowed from every friend I possessed, to keep body and soul together, until these sources of assistance were utterly exhausted. My clothes were so badly worn that they became a new obstacle to my obtaining a berth, and I was deep in debt to my landlady—a kind-hearted and long-suffering woman, of whom I felt it was cruel to take advantage.

"One evening in October—the sixteenth—I was utterly dejected and despondent. I had spent the day in making my usual tour of City offices, and in scanning the advertisement columns of the daily newspapers. But when night come, and I walked back to my lodgings, I felt as if all hope had departed from me. A great change seemed to have come over me that day. I no longer cared for what happened. I had a feeling that the struggle was over, that I had done my best, and could and would do no more. Such a life was not worth living. Why not end it?

"Never before that evening had I contemplated suicide, but now the idea possessed me, enslaved me. It was so easy, so reasonable, so complete a solution of all my difficulties. I had not asked to live. Why should I be forbidden to die? A man who had others dependent on him was a coward to put an end to himself; but I—whom did it concern what happened to me? One City acquaintance would say to another: 'You remember Harold Gregory—used to be with Wilkins and Stokes?—I hear he blew his brains out, or something of the sort. By the way, have you seen the new Gaiety burlesque?' That's all.

"Well, I went to my bedroom; I scribbled a note and left it on my dressing-table. I took my revolver from my drawer and placed it in my pocket. Telling my landlady that I should not return home until very late I stepped into the street and banged the door behind me.

"Turning round, I saw that my terrier, Jack, was beside me. During that terrible time of proverty and anxiety I had never parted with Jack. The faithful dog had been almost my only friend. Poor brute, he must not accompany me now. I stooped down and caressed him.

"'Jack,' I said, 'you must go indoors. You can't come with me to-night.' But he looked up at me with such pleading eyes. I verily believe that he knew what I was going to do, and he seemed to be saying: 'Let me go! If you must die, at least let me die with you!'

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"I relented, and he kept by me all the way. It was a dark, chilly night, with a fine drizzling rain, as I walked along the slippery streets towards the park. A load seemed to have been lifted off my shoulders, and I felt that the battle of life for me would now soon be over. But my thoughts were more of Jack than of myself. I resolved that he should die first. It was better than that he should live to mourn his master and fall into cruel hands. And, perhaps, after all, the Indian, with his untutored mind, was right in supposing that in the happy hunting grounds 'his faithful dog should bear him company.'

"When we got to the park, I sought a secluded spot, and halted. Taking the dog in my arms, I said: 'Jack, you have been a faithful dog. We will die together. I must kill you first; but I won't play you false, old fellow, the next bullet will send me after you. Good-bye, Jack! Dear old Jack!'

"I placed the muzzle of my revolver against his head. He did not flinch, but raised his trustful eyes to mine. I pulled the trigger, and the poor dog rolled over—dead.

"I did not hesitate a minute in next placing the revolver against my right temple. My hand was steady, and I felt no fear. I carefully judged my aim, and again pulled the trigger. There was no report! The chambers were all empty.

"I speak the truth when I say that my feelings were not of relief and thankfulness. I was simply enraged at my disappointment. For a moment I stood bewildered, then threw the weapon away into the darkness. I would not be foiled. Was there not the river, in which I could drown myself?

"Kneeling down first to take a hasty farewell of poor Jack, I made my way back into the street. I had not a penny in my pocket, so had to make my journey on foot.

"I scribbled a note and left it on my dressing-table."

In turning a corner a man stopped me to inquire his way. We passed beneath a lamp, and as we glanced into one another's faces there was an instant mutual recognition.

"'Gregory!'

"'Mansfield!'

"'Why, Gregory, old fellow, you are the very man I want. I have been trying to find you everywhere, but since Wilkins and Stokes smashed nobody could tell me where I might lay hands on you. I want—why, how ill you look! Been down on your luck, old boy? So I heard. Broke, I suppose. Well, come back with me to my hotel; I want to have a chat with you at once.'

"Mansfield, an old chum of mine, had gone abroad many years before to seek his fortune—nobody knew where—and had found it. He had come back to establish himself in business, and he said I was the very man he wanted to look after his interest.

"The firm is now, as you know, Mansfield and Gregory, and I am very far from wishing myself dead.

"But remember this: If poor Jack had not received that bullet in his brain, it would have entered mine. I played the poor dog false, after all, so the least I can do is to keep him in affectionate remembrance. And to-morrow is the 16th October."

MADGE MORRIS.

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The Nightingale AND The Griffin.

It is very rare that a pretty woman in Europe possesses a harsh voice, while a musical organ is seldom unaccompanied by pleasant features.

As an abiding proof of the infallibility of a musical ear I well remember when I was living in Brussels, how my attention was attracted one summer evening by the sweetest voice I ever listened to.

My rooms were in a street at a corner of the place in which stands that Grand Hotel de Ville, with its arcades and its high roof perforated with innumerable mansard windows, and its gothic spire, which is only inferior to that of the cathedral at Antwerp.

As I said before, it was summer, just beginning, when roses are within every one's price, and the sun has not become too sultry during the day to make the evenings heavy.

Somehow or other I did not feel inclined to go in the Park, where there is a splendid orchestra, most inferior beer, and worse coffee; the theatres were all closed, and I had no wish to encounter the hordes of wandering tourists in the Galleries St. Hubert.

The chimes had just sent their last vibration echoing round the square when I first heard the exquisite voice of my evidently lovely neighbour opposite.

I had often scanned the two windows with their guipure curtains, their embroidered blinds—the Belgians are fond of an ornamental lace centre—and their rose-bushes in bright vermilion-painted pots upon the sills.

It was not affluence, but it certainly was comfort, added to a feminine taste, which argued with the voice, not only beauty, but culture: and to judge by the touch on the piano, an unrivalled education.

The first strains fell like heavenly melody from the sky for the voice floated up above me, as I fancied, and must have been sung by some wandering angel who had descended near us to catch the ancient chimes.

But soon through the tranquil air I thought I caught the words which were not likely to emanate either from Gabriel or Michael. "*Comme à vingt ans*," was not very new even then; but sung by such a voice, its sweetness was doubly thrilling, and I listened with open mouth and beating heart to verse after verse, as the sentiment changed from gay to grave and back again to patient resignation.

Such a young voice could only regret its twenty years for song's sake.

Sweet seventeen only thought of the charming melody, and cared little for the words; though the chastened melancholy of the refrain was well preserved all through.

Ah! I could see her, poor darling, all alone; for there was only one rigid old maid to watch over her; a griffin in a silver-grey alpaca dress, who flitted weirdly past the curtains and went periodical journeys to the markets for her young mistress.

When the voice was silent, I could hear the fingers recalling Chopin's tenderest mazurkas, or Mendelssohn's songs, till tears would start to my eyes as I sympathised with the caged nightingale.

When even the piano was no longer audible, I could not resist taking my violin and interweaving the melodies I had heard, with a strain which, I flattered myself, accurately expressed my respectful longing for the invisible cantatrice.

I fell asleep that night in a seventh heaven of harmonious æons, where archangels and houris played silver trumpets and golden zithers in a sort of Walkyr fuge, while one fair head in a glory of brilliant auburn hovered permanently over the divine orchestra. The annoying part of the dream was that the head had its back towards me, not a feature could I see.

Occasionally the griffin would come in with a trombone accompaniment, much to the discomfiture of Gabriel's trumpet call: but silver trumpets, golden zithers, and auburn halos were all forgotten by the time I went across the Place in the morning to get my early coffee.

As I crossed the street I saw the griffin, quintessence of repelling respectability, with her small key and her large basket, on her way to market; and I watched for the postman who brought my letters, and actually had the hardihood to look over his shoulders as he slipped a letter under my fair neighbour's door and there read "Mdlle. Blanche Rosat" in a fine Italian hand.

"Rosat" suggested summer, the Graces and Paphos, at the least, while the youth and virgin candour of her *petit nom* "Blanche" corroborated all my fancy had painted, and completed the perfection of my ideal.

There was some cruel mystery attached to my poor Blanche—she was *my* Blanche already, as I whispered in confidence to my violin. She was never allowed to leave the house unless, as I suspected, the griffin took her out when the night shades fell over the tranquil city.

Many a time I watched at my window when the voice and the instrument had ceased; many a time I stood at the corner of the street in sanguine expectation of catching a glimpse of the pretty prisoner and her sour-visaged gaoler; but all in vain. The griffin seemed to know when I was sentry, and took especial care to take her walks abroad alone.

I now knew exactly the hours when my Blanche sat down

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to her piano. I know she used to expect my presence, for the guipure curtains would shake, and the lace-embroidered blind would flutter, as if some hand were there and some eye at watch to note whether or not I was at my post.

At my post? Why, I used to run away from my *table d'hôte* if the courses were longer than usual, or the dessert later in arriving, rather than miss a note of the divine Blanche's song. I really believe I should have burst into tears if the song had not come or the piano remained untouched after I opened my window for my nightly audience.

By night and by day Blanche so possessed my thoughts that I was determined to risk even the overwhelming angers of the griffin; and, sitting down seriously to my desk with a sheet of pink paper, highly scented with some musky horror, I wrote the first lines my poetical soul dictated to me.

I could write French well, but I had never perpetrated anything in French verse, and I fear I mixed up voices and souls, and fading forms to such a perplexing extent that Blanche, if she ever read my lines, must have doubted much of my sanity, unless her young affections were as exercised as mine.

There was no answer to my lines. My hopes had risen, when I saw the griffin with a flushed face making rapid tracks for the melon stall. I fondly hoped some three-cornered note wrapped round a pebble might fly across the street from her window into mine.

I did not receive any answer, either that day or the next.

The voice seemed to become more plaintive, more pleading, as if there were something to forgive, something to excuse; but if that was a reply, it did not satisfy my ardent devotion, and I wrote again, not in verse this time, but in correct grammatical sentimental prose.

"The prayer of an ardent admirer, your devoted slave, who longs for the day when that sweet voice will command him. If I have as yet never seen your ravishing features, I believe that so lovely must be the soul which hides behind that divine voice, that any face it owns must be heavenly in my eyes; any form that of a goddess inspired by such a voice. Listen to my prayer, sweet divinity, and let me at your feet express the delight your sweet song has afforded me."

I felt that such words could only emanate from a heart absolutely and uncontrollably in love.

At last the answer came. Only a few words, in a long distinguished hand which breathed youth and affection in every line. "Live and hope" was all it meant, and almost all it said.

That night there was a bright sparkle in the clear, melodious harmony that came out on the air. It sang of life and hope for two young hearts which pined apart, and now at last were coming together.

I wrote again more daringly, more fervently. I adored her voice, and asked to be allowed to press the fingers which touched the piano I had so long listened to.

The answer came again, and this time I was promised an appointment for the next evening, when I should be allowed to meet Blanche, my adored Blanche.

All day my heart was too much for me. It fluttered and twitted and chirped in the most aggravating way; I could neither eat nor drink, and even my violin was forgotten.

I wandered among the trees of the park, down by the side of the canal, through the palace picture galleries, without noting a Rubens or a Schneyder; along the arcades without gazing into a single shop-window.

Oh! but it was an eternity to wait until seven o'clock.

As the clock of St. Gudule struck seven I was at her door, and, finding it open, I stepped upstairs to her room.

Blanche was waiting for me. I could hear the prelude to one of Schumann's songs, as her fingers ran lightly and lovingly over the keys.

The room was in half shadow, but all within and on the walls spoke of its young mistress's taste and love of art.

In the centre of the room, concealing the music-stool and the piano from me, stood the griffin, flushed, and with her eyes cast down.

"Ah! monsieur! who could help being touched by such devotion? I feared, I dreaded the meeting, but constancy like yours——"

"Must be rewarded!" I gasped. "Oh! let me see my Blanche, whose angel voice has held such sweet communion with me. Bring me to Blanche!"

"She is here!" whispered the gushing griffin. "I am Blanche Rosat!"

* * * * *

It was rude, it was indeed most unfeeling, but I rushed from the room, dashed home, packed my violin into my hatbox, and left Brussels for ever. The griffin and the nightingale were one and the same. I shall never, so long as I live, trust a voice again.

M. M.

THERE IS SOMETHING - -
- - - of More than Ordinary Interest
in
This Week's Number of HOME NOTES.

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By John K. Leys, *author of "The Tenth of June," etc., etc.*

SUMMARY.

While on a sketching tour in Wales, Launcelot Vere gets into a dangerous position on the face of a precipice. His life is saved by Winifred Denvers, to whom he becomes engaged. On the wedding morning Launcelot fails to put in an appearance at church, and no news can be heard of him. Miss Unwin, the village schoolmistress, has disappeared at the same time. Harold Kenyon, a friend of Launcelot's, determines to leave Wythecombe in search of his friend, and goes to London. He finds that the missing man has drawn £75 from his bank, and also discovers several sketches of Miss Unwin in the artist's room. Paul Shenstone presses his suit with Katherine Dale, who unwillingly agrees to marry him in October. Winifred is still convinced of Launcelot's innocence of any foul play. Kenyon interviews the guard of the train by which Miss Unwin travelled to London, and finds that she was met by a man corresponding in description to Vere. On return to town he finds that Miss Unwin has been murdered on Hampstead Heath, and the trial reveals the fact that she and Vere were at one time very friendly.

Katherine Dale,	A young lady with whom Harold Kenyon is in love.
Paul Shenstone,	Engaged to Katherine Dale.
Rev. Mark Denvers,	Rector of Wythecombe, and Winifred's father.
Mr. Beaumont,	A solicitor, and friendly with Vere.
Mr. Daunt.	An old lawyer, and friendly with Vere.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

CHAPTER IX.

The Revolver Case.

While Mrs. Unwin had been giving her evidence, Harold Kenyon had been exchanging signs of recognition with the Coroner's clerk, a young man named Tyler. He had been one of the junior clerks in the branch bank in which Kenyon had been employed before he went down to Darnport.

During the adjournment the two exchanged a few words, and Kenyon took the opportunity of saying:

"Wasn't there a revolver found beside that poor girl's body?"

"Yes," answered the clerk.

"Do you think you could get me an opportunity of looking at it."

"Don't know I'm sure. The police inspector has charge of it."

"Ask him for it. He will think the Coroner wants it, and give it to you at once. I only want to look at it."

Tyler did as he was asked. He got the revolver, and handed it to his friend.

The room was nearly empty; and Kenyon carried the weapon to one of the windows, that he might examine it at his leisure.

It was a dainty little thing, this murderous toy, hardly larger than the handle of an umbrella stick. Harold knew enough about small arms to see that it was of an uncommon pattern. Judging from the delicate workmanship one would have supposed that it had been manufactured on purpose to be presented to some one.

The case which Kenyon had found in Vere's room lay in one of the outside pockets of his overcoat. He drew it out of his pocket, and slipped the revolver into it. It fitted to a nicety! Every tiny projection was provided for by a depression in the soft velvet. It was only what Harold had expected; yet a shudder passed through his limbs, as he realised what the testimony of this dumb witness meant.

Suddenly a hand was laid on Harold's shoulder, and in an instant he recognised the madness of his conduct. But it was too late.

He looked up, and found a police inspector gazing at him curiously.

"That seems a very good fit. Just let me look at it, sir," said the man.

Harold thrust the revolver and case into his pocket, and confronted the officer of justice with set teeth and a frown on his face.

"If I'm not mistaken," said the policeman, "that's the very weapon I'm supposed to have charge of. I thought the Coroner wanted to have a look at it, or I wouldn't have let it out o' my sight. Let me see it for a moment. If it's not the right one I'll give it back to you."

To have hesitated longer would simply have brought Tyler into trouble without improving matters in the least. Harold disengaged the revolver from the case without drawing it out of his pocket, and then handing it to the policeman, walked hastily to the door.

"Not so fast, sir," said the inspector, making a sign to a comrade who stood by the door. "This is the weapon, sure enough. And now, perhaps you'll let me have a look at the case?"

Harold took time to consider.

The policeman had no right to arrest him, no power to search him and take the case from him. But the officer would immediately appeal to the Coroner, who, he felt sure, legally or illegally, would never let him leave the premises a free man till he had given up the case. Obstinacy could only result in his being committed to prison for contempt of court, and in that event the revolver-case would be taken by force.

He surrendered the case; and the inspector, telling his subordinate to keep an eye on Harold, carried it, with the revolver, to the Coroner.

Thirty seconds had not elapsed before the Coroner came into the room, an excited look on his face.

"Where is the gentleman? Oh, this is he! I presume you have come here to give information about this revolver."

"No, I never saw the thing before, to my knowledge."

"About the case then."

"No. It isn't mine."

"Who gave it to you? I see the revolver fits it accurately." Then, seeing that Kenyon made no reply, he added: "You need not trouble to answer. The jury will be back in five minutes; and when the court reassembles, I shall summon you as a witness."

Almost before he could frame a reply, a *subpœna* was

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thrust into his hand. In a few minutes he found himself at the table, the Testament in his hand. He laid the book down without kissing it.

"Stop a moment," he said to the Coroner. "You seem to be under a misapprehension. I know nothing whatever about this girl, or the manner in which she came by her death. I never saw her in my life. Nor did I ever see the revolver found beside her. I merely looked at it out of curiosity. It is true it fits a pistol case I had in my pocket; but that is merely an accident. Any other revolver—many revolvers, at any rate—would fit it equally well."

"Very true, perhaps," said the Coroner in a guarded manner, "but it is quite necessary that I should put one question to you."

"What is that, sir?" interrupted Kenyon.

"And that you should answer it upon oath. Be good enough to take the book once more in your right hand."

There was no escape; and Harold had time to reflect, as the Coroner arranged his papers, that the time for concealment had gone by. The more he fenced with the Coroner's questions and tried to screen his friend, the more would he arouse and strengthen suspicion. If he refused to answer, he would cause everyone to believe that he knew something more damning than even the possession of the case.

"Where did you get this case?" was the Coroner's first question.

Kenyon made no reply.

"I will give you a minute or two to make up your mind," said the Coroner.

For two minutes by the clock there was dead silence in the room. Then the Coroner spoke again.

"I can see that you are trying to shield some one, some friend, probably, and to a certain extent I sympathise with you. But, believe me, you are only injuring your friend's cause. Of course, if you persist in remaining silent, you will have to go to prison, and we shall get the information we want in some other way."

Suddenly a hand was laid on Harold's shoulder.

Before Kenyon could make up his mind as to how he should shape his reply, Mrs. Unwin, looking fixedly at the revolver, which lay upon the table in its case, said:

"That's Mr. Vere's revolver, sir. I'm sure of it. Now that it is in the case I can swear to it. He brought it down to Richmond, to Mr. Pascoe's I mean, to put it in a picture he was painting."

"Then your daughter may have borrowed it, may have had it by her all this time," observed the Coroner. And without giving the woman time to reply, he added, speaking to Kenyon: "You see that possession of the revolver-case cannot be conclusive evidence against any one. But we can easily find Mr. Vere's address; and if the case was his, some one must have seen it in his room. We shall be able to get corroboration of Mrs. Unwin's testimony independently of you. Come, now. Reflect that if your friend is really guilty you ought not to stand in the way of justice reaching him. If he is innocent, as I hope he is, his innocence will be made clear. You picked up that case in Mr. Vere's room, did you not?"

"Yes, I did."

The words were spoken at last, and Harold hardly knew whether he was acting the part of a true man or that of a false friend as he spoke them.

"What is his address?"

"Twenty-six Cumber Street."

"He must be sent for at once," said the Coroner, turning to a policeman.

"It is of no use," said Harold. "He is not at home. He has not been at his rooms since——"

He stopped, terror-stricken. What new blunder had he been guilty of?

"Since when has Mr. Vere been absent from home?" asked the Coroner. "We can easily find out by applying to his housekeeper or servants," he added.

This was true enough. A dozen people knew as much of Vere's disappearances as he did. "But oh!" thought Kenyon, "it is hard that I should be the one chosen by Fate to swear away my old friend's life!"

He resolved to say no more. Come what might he would no longer bear witness against Vere. He remained obstinately silent; and the Coroner adjourned the inquiry for a week. As he now had his finger on the clue he wanted, and had privately a good deal of sympathy for Kenyon, he did not take the extreme measure of sending him to prison for refusing to answer questions.

Next day's newspapers carried a report of these proceedings all over the country; and when the inquiry was resumed there was no lack of evidence. It was shown that the time of Jane Unwin's elopement exactly coincided with the time of Vere's disappearance; and—most fatal witness of all—Martin, the railway guard, came forward to tell what he had observed on the platform at Paddington.

Kenyon, who had returned to Darnport for the week, went up to town for the adjourned inquest. He felt as if he owed that much to the Coroner, who might have enforced his attendance in a very unpleasant way.

But he could not bring himself to enter the crowded court-room. He got a room upstairs, and waited there for the verdict.

Soon, terribly soon, it came——

"Wilful murder against Launcelot Vere."

And Harold Kenyon left the inn, feeling as if he had played the part of a traitor.

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CHAPTER X.

A Faithful Heart.

On the evening of the day when the verdict was delivered, two girls were sitting together in a small room in the upper flat of Wythecombe Rectory. They were Winnie Denvers and Katherine Dale. Winnie's bedroom had been turned into a kind of sitting-room, for there were few days when she felt strong enough to go downstairs.

It was a chilly evening, the day had been wet and gloomy, and a fire had been lit. The two girls sat before it, hand in hand, without speaking. They were generally silent, or all but silent, when they were alone together. Each had her own sorrow; and although Kate never spoke of hers, Winnie suspected it, and gave her an unspoken sympathy. Once or twice she had tried to make Kate confide in her fully; but she saw that the effort to speak would cost her friend too much.

"That's Mr. Vere's revolver, sir."

"The past cannot be undone," Kate had said once, with a look in her eyes that Winnie had never seen in any face before.

"No," said Kate decisively. "Better—" she stopped. "What does it matter?" she said, after a long pause. "We were not sent into the world simply to be happy."

Winnie was eager to say more; but the conversation was interrupted, and it had never been renewed.

Sitting there in the firelight Kate was wondering whether her companion's fate or her own were the hardest—to live in suspense as to the fate of one who is dearer than all the world, or to be forced into a loveless marriage, compelled to fly from what the heart hungers for.

A knock came to the door—a maidservant entered and put a card into Katherine's hand.

"For me! How can that be?" she said, as she took the bit of pasteboard. Then she flushed up, and said wonderingly: "At this hour! To have followed me here! I can't see him."

"It is not past—there is time yet to draw back," the younger girl had whispered.

"Who is it, Katie? Oh, Mr. Kenyon! You must see him—at once, Kate. Oh, go this moment. He may have news."

"There is little chance of that, I fear. If there had been good news he would have telegraphed. But if you wish it I will see him for a moment."

Katherine felt almost like a hypocrite as she said this; for although she felt that it was presumptuous in Mr. Kenyon to come after her to the Rectory, something in her heart cried out so loudly that she must see him, that she must hear his voice, if only for a moment, that she seemed to have no power to resist it. She moved slowly, but her feet longed to run; and Winnie, agitated and tearful, urged her to make haste.

Outside the door of the library—the room into which Kenyon had been shown—she paused, to obtain full command of her features; and in that moment of waiting she heard a sigh so sad and so profound, that it told her more of Kenyon's state of mind than he could have made known to her in hours of speech.

Softly opening the door, she went in. He was standing with his elbows on the mantelpiece, leaning his head on his hands. At the sound of her entrance he turned round, and smiled a little as he held out his hand; but his face, Kate noticed, was pale and haggard.

"You may be sure, Miss Dale," he began, "that I would not have intruded on you here, at this time of night, without some good reason."

"Have you news—of him?"

"Not in the sense you mean. But you know that Jane Unwin was found dead, and that an inquest was held?"

"Yes, we saw that in the newspapers. We are anxiously waiting for to-morrow's paper to see what the verdict is."

"I came here to-night to ask you to warn Mrs. Denvers not to let her daughter see the paper to-morrow."

"Why? What will be in it?"

"Do you think she—Miss Winifred—still cares for Vere?"

"I'm afraid there's no doubt of that."

"Then next morning's news will be dreadful for her to hear! Yet she must know it sooner or later."

"What is it?"

"The jury have found that Jane Unwin was—murdered—by Launcelot Vere."

"Great heaven!—You do not believe it?"

"Miss Dale, for days I have been asking myself that question. I cannot answer it. A month ago I would almost have staked my soul's welfare on Launcelot's innocence. I would have scouted the idea of such a thing being possible. But, alas! the proofs are so clear! They cannot have been manufactured. We know that Miss Unwin left Wythecombe suddenly, telegraphing to some one on her way up to London, and that she was met by Launcelot. They left the station together, and have never been seen since—never till the poor woman's body is found with her old lover's portrait next her heart, and his pistol lying at her side."

"She may have taken the pistol and shot herself with it!" cried Kate.

"That has been my sole ground for hope; but the doctors are very positive that the light clothes she wore would have been singed if she had fired the revolver herself. I am ready and anxious to hope to the last; but I confess that had I been on the jury I would have concurred in the verdict. We are not the first—I should say I am not the first—who has been ready to take an oath that a friend was innocent, only to find that the bitter truth was none the less true!"

"Are you speaking of Launcelot, Mr. Kenyon?"

Harold and Kate both started. It was Winnie. Kate had unintentionally left the door ajar, and they had not heard Winnie come in. Her impatience to hear what Kenyon had to say had driven her downstairs. Neither

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Harold nor Kate knew what to say to her. She read evil tidings in their downcast looks, but she boldly repeated her question: "Are you speaking of Launcelot?"

Still no one answered her, and she went on:

"For, if you are, I can only say this, neither of you knows anything at all about him. You have been trying," she continued, turning to Kenyon, "you have been trying to find out what has become of him ever since—ever since—" her lips trembled pitifully, but she mastered herself and went on—"ever since he went away. And what have you found out? Nothing! I don't blame you for a moment. I am grateful to you; yes, I am grateful, for I am sure you did all that any could have done. But you have not discovered what became of Launcelot. And in the meantime I am not going to think ill of him, or to listen to anyone who believes ill of him."

Harold and Kate looked at each other in wonder, and then back to Winnie. The slight fair-haired little thing stood before them. Her attitude was entirely changed. Her figure was drawn up, her eyes flashing indignantly, her small white hands clenched.

"Very well, my dear, we will wait for news," said Kate soothingly; and she stepped forward to take her hand and lead her upstairs.

"You know something," she said, drawing back from her friend, and turning to Harold. "I am not afraid to hear it. What is your news?"

Harold threw an appealing look at Kate, and remained silent.

"Was it not because you have heard something, some rumour perhaps, about Launcelot, that you came here to-night?"

Then suddenly her manner became harder, more defiant than ever.

"Have you come from London?" she asked. "Possibly. Have you any news of the inquest? Tell me if you have."

Again Harold's eyes sought Katherine's for guidance. And this time they said: "Speak!" She felt certain that Winifred would never be better able to hear the dreaded word "murder" joined with her lover's name than she was at that moment.

"There was a man named Martin, a railway guard," began Harold. He paused.

"Yes?" from Winifred.

"He came before the Coroner, and said he had seen Launcelot meet Jane Unwin at Paddington, the day she left here."

"Yes?"

"And so the jury thought he must be responsible for her death."

"But she committed suicide, poor thing, didn't she?"

"I cannot say. The doctors declare that she could not have done so."

"But some one else may have killed her."

"Perhaps so."

"Or it may have been an accident."

Harold was silent.

"Don't you think so?"

"I'm afraid that is impossible," said Kenyon, almost in a whisper. For a few moments there was silence in the room. Then Winnie began to speak again, her breast heaving with emotion.

"And they think Launcelot is responsible — how responsible?"

"Miss Denvers, don't ask me. We may be thankful now that I did *not* succeed in tracing Vere."

"What! They think he *murdered* her?"

A smile half of amazement, half of contempt, lit up her face.

"And perhaps you think so too? What was it you were saying when I came into the room—that others who had been ready to stake their existence on a friend's innocence had been deceived? That was Launcelot you were speaking of, wasn't it? And you think he shot the woman?"

"I hope, I pray it may not be true; but what am I to think? The evidence——" He stopped. Better, he thought, leave Winnie to believe in her lover's innocence if she could.

"And this is a man's friendship!" she cried scornfully. "A thing that goes by reason, and evidence; it is rational, sensible. It knows nothing of faith. It leaves folly of that kind to women, I suppose."

Harold said nothing. He was amazed—amazed that this tender and delicate creature should be capable of attacking anyone as she was now attacking him. Her cheeks and eyes

A maidservant entered and put a card into Katherine's hand.

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burned with indignation. She looked as though the other two had offered her some mortal insult. And every word she uttered cut Harold Kenyon like the lash of a whip.

"You forget," he said, stung by her sarcasm, "that he was seen with her at Paddington."

"The man told a lie," said Winifred calmly, "or he was mistaken. It doesn't matter which."

"I think it is quite possible that he was mistaken," said Katherine.

"Oh, Kate! Kate!" cried the girl, throwing herself into her friend's arms, while her overstrung nerves found relief in a flood of tears, "I have been longing to ask you if *you* really believe Launcelot guilty"—she shuddered now as she spoke the words—"of murdering poor Miss Unwin, and I didn't dare. Because I was afraid you might say that you *did* believe it. And then—then we couldn't have been friends any longer, could we? I couldn't really love anyone that thought Launcelot a murderer. But I have you still."

She was sitting now on Kate's knees, one arm thrown round her neck. She turned to Harold, her sweet blue eyes still swimming in tears.

"We are not quite so irrational as you think," she said, smiling through her tears. "Do you suppose I have not thought over every circumstance, and balanced one thing against the other, as well as you? But you give too much weight to details. You think too much of coincidences, which may, after all, be purely accidental. And you don't give weight enough to what you know of a man's character."

"I did and I do give great weight to Vere's character. He is the last man in the world I should have believed guilty of such a crime. Even now I cannot think that he is guilty."

"But you fear that he is guilty?"

Harold said nothing.

"And I know he is not guilty."

Winnie's tones rang out strong and clear. She looked from Kate to Harold and back to Kate, as if she had determined to convert them both to her opinion.

"I suppose you would say that if Launcelot eloped with Jane Unwin it must have been he that shot her. But I do not admit that for a moment. What I feel, is that although he might conceivably have been weak enough to run away with her, it is not conceivable that he could be wicked enough to take her life."

"And perhaps you think so too?"

"Launcelot to take the life of a woman, a woman who loved him!" she cried. "It is impossible. It is not true! Ah! He must be ill, very ill, or he would write to me. And if I were a man, I would find him. Forgive me!" she cried suddenly, laying her hand on Harold's sleeve, and looking up in his face with the frank, fearless gaze of a child. "It was so thoughtless of me to say that, when you have been working so hard in your friend's cause. But I suppose a girl thinks she must win when she fights for the one she loves. You know," she added, with a winning smile, "you know I am almost Launcelot's wife."

"Oh, Kate! Kate!" cried the girl.

CHAPTER XI.

A False Step.

It was now time for Kate to return home; and Harold offered, as a matter of course, to walk with her as far as her mother's door.

The two set out together, and walked side by side for some minutes in perfect silence.

"Thank God she can still believe him innocent!" cried Harold, evidently referring to the girl they had just left.

"It will lighten the blow for her wonderfully," answered Kate. "But I wonder whether she is right in thinking that one *can* be as sure of anyone as she is of her lover. Is it true that one human being can rationally say of another, 'I am justified in refusing to believe, against any conceivable weight of evidence, that this man committed such a crime?'"

"In some cases," answered Harold, "such faith would be justified by the result. But very often, I fear, it would not."

"I suppose you are right," said Kate with a sigh.

They were only a few yards from Mrs. Dale's house, when they noticed a figure on the road before them. A step or two more, and they saw it was Paul Shenstone.

"Is that you, Kate? What made you so late? Your mother is getting quite anxious, and begged me to come in search of you."

"I will bid you good-night, then, Miss Dale," said Kenyon.

"Good-night, Shenstone."

"Good-night, and thank you so much for bringing Miss Dale home," said Shenstone with elaborate politeness.

Kate laid her small gloved hand in Harold's for an instant, but said nothing.

Kenyon's footsteps died away, and the other two paced slowly on together.

Kate shivered, not from cold, for the air, though damp, was warm.

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"Did he bring any news?" asked Shenstone abruptly.

"The jury have found a verdict against Vere."

"Wilful murder?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"Paul, you do not believe him guilty?"

"I don't see how anyone can suppose that he is innocent, if evidence is worth anything. But it was not about that I wished to speak to you."

"Won't another time do, Paul? You said my mother was anxious."

"She is not so anxious as not to be able to wait while I have said what I have got to say," said Shenstone coolly. "It won't take long."

Still he paused for a minute or two, and Kate waited patiently.

"I don't like your seeing so much of that fellow Kenyon," he said abruptly.

Kate started. It had never occurred to her that Paul would be jealous, seeing that there had never been anything approaching intimacy between the young banker and herself.

She paused for a moment before replying. Then she said: "I do not think I have given you any cause for complaint. Mr. Kenyon was introduced to me in the ordinary way; and no one can say that he is not a person of good reputation. And I have seen very little of him. However, if you object to my seeing him at all, I shall drop the acquaintance. Of course," she added, "I don't mean that I shall deny myself to him, especially if he should ask me to help him in clearing his friend from the accusation he is lying under. Indeed, that is the only subject that has brought us together at all."

"Exactly," said Shenstone. "I don't think that is a matter you should be mixed up with in any way."

"I am not mixed up with it," said Kate, "except in the way of doing what I can to cheer poor Winifred."

"Of course she will have no more to do with Vere after this?"

"On the contrary, she persists that he is innocent, and considers herself as still engaged to him."

"But this is simply infatuation!"

"It shows great faith, certainly. And yet, I think she may be right. She must know best——"

"What nonsense!" burst in Shenstone. "As if a girl's fancies were to be weighed against facts! Of course she must take her own course, if her father is fool enough to allow it. But I object to your being associated in people's minds with her and Kenyon as Vere's defenders."

It was Paul Shenstone.

"Fool that I am!"

"I understand," said Kate quietly, "I will do nothing to set myself up as either his defender or his accuser. And now I think I must bid you good-night."

They had been approaching the garden gate as they talked, and as Kate said these last words she opened the gate and passed inside, glad to have brought the conversation to an end without a quarrel, and without having absolutely promised not to see Harold Kenyon again.

Mrs. Dale was waiting, ready to open the door.

"I am sorry to be so late, mamma," said Kate, as she crossed the threshold; "but you need not have been anxious about me."

"I wasn't anxious, my dear. I knew one of the servants would see you home, or come to say that they had kept you over night at the Rectory."

"Didn't you say to Mr. Shenstone that you were getting anxious about me?"

"Mr. Shenstone? No. He called in the early part of the evening; and when I told him you were at the Rectory he went away, and I have not seen him since."

Katherine's lip curled with disdain as she went slowly upstairs. It was a small matter. Mr. Shenstone might easily have imagined himself to be saying that Mrs. Dale must be feeling anxious, or something of that kind. But Kate, who had an almost Quakerish scrupulosity in matters of truth or falsehood, felt offended and disgusted. Her mother's name had been brought in, without the least warrant, in order to make it appear that she had been to blame, when she had not in the least.

Meanwhile Shenstone was walking rapidly home, in a state of great anger against Katherine, Kenyon, and himself most of all.

"Fool that I am!" he cried out, clenching his fists savagely. "And the wedding day not fixed yet! I must apologise, eat humble pie; that always fetches women. I suppose I must give way about that fellow Kenyon—confound it. I may as well do so gracefully, for I see she would not obey me if I insisted on her not seeing him again. Well! She can hardly refuse now to fix an early day for our marriage, on the score of sympathy with Miss Denvers; that's one comfort;" and a peculiar smile flitted over Shenstone's features as this thought crossed his mind.

"I must see Kate to-morrow," he added to himself, "put myself straight with her, and, if possible, get her to fix the marriage day not later than the twelfth of next month."

(To be continued.)

IT IS NOT TOO LATE,

even now, to start reading "The Final War," in *Pearson's Weekly*. Every instalment is crammed with stirring incidents.

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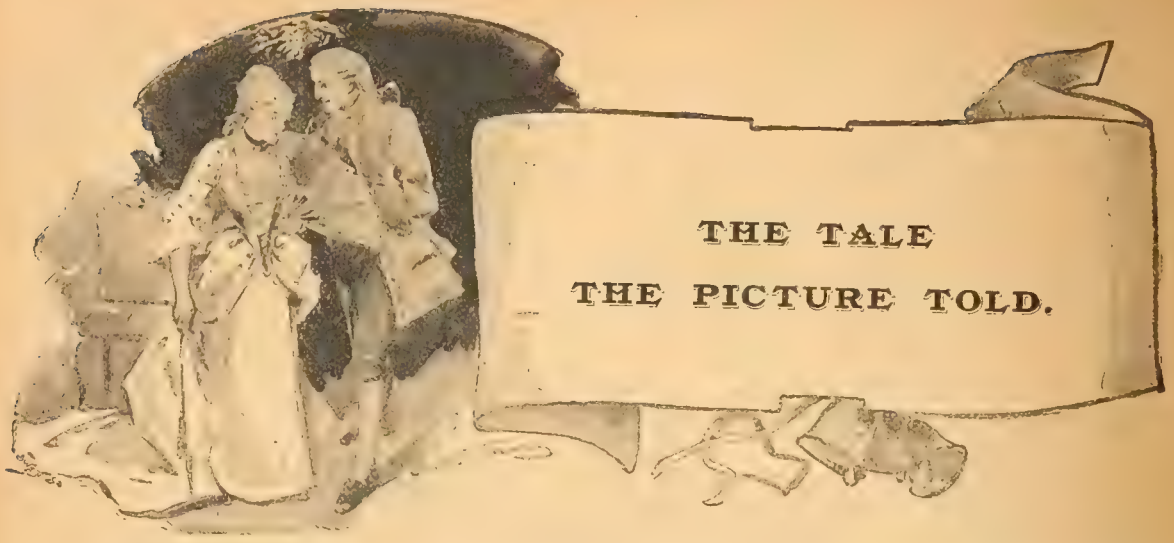

THE TALE THE PICTURE TOLD.

I HAD an adventure to-day. Can you believe that my diary is steeped in every page with the gloomy monotony of the last ten years? An adventure it terrifies me to remember, and yet it gives me strange thrills of joy—if it is joy. What experiences have I ever had of happiness that I should know the sensation when it comes?

"Happiness, content, pleasure!" I write the three words and look at them stupidly, wondering at their meaning, as if they were an unknown language. Are they not? Fifteen years ago my mother died, and two days afterwards my father blew out his brains because the bank in which all his money was deposited failed. It was a brave thing to do, to commit suicide, leaving me—a child of four years old—to find out what the world means by charity. I begged or starved, as the case might be, varying the programme by sobbing myself to sleep after being beaten.

When I was nine years old the hag who gave me a corner in a cellar for a bedroom, a crust for a meal, told me my uncle had come from France, and was going to take me away. Any change seemed glorious to me, and when two police officers took me to court, and I was formally identified as Editha Berri and as formally given over to the guardianship of my mother's brother, Gordon Willoughby, I put my hand in that of the stern man who claimed me, and actually imagined I was going to a better home than the corner of the dark damp cellar—a better guardian than the hag who had beaten me for four years. We came here.

Oh, merciful Heaven! what had I—a baby of nine years—ever done, to be brought here?

The house is immense, and I begged in a city long enough to know a big house when I see one. The grounds are extensive, and a high wall shuts us in on all four sides.

One grim woman keeps the rooms we occupy in order, and the garden and orchard run to waste. Two miles off there is a village, and five miles beyond that, a city.

Every week a man drives up to the gate from the city, and delivers the goods ordered the week before, taking fresh orders. And I notice that the name upon the packages is "MR. Gordon," never "Gordon Willoughby."

My uncle taught me to read and write and gave me the key of the bookcases in the library, leaving me to finish my education or leave it unfinished, as I thought fit. There is a piano in the house, and I have learned to touch the keys and make a noise that pleases me. I wonder if that is music.

In the library there are about fifty novels, and I have read every one, and so I can picture the life other girls lead and contrast it with mine. In ten years I have never been beyond the tall iron gate that shuts me in this prison more than a dozen times. There is a stretch of seabeach beyond them, and a horrible line of cliffs overhanging the sea. I have walked there a few times, but I hate it! I hate the cliffs!

I think that is because of the picture. My uncle is a student and an artist, I suppose. He shuts himself up in his study all day, never coming to his meals, which are carried to him, while I eat mine in the kitchen with Anne. There, in his study, he reads and paints all day.

One picture was brought here when his luggage came, ten years ago, and was hung in the study, and I have seen him sit for hours and look at it with a glare in his eyes that was horrible to see.

This is the picture. Ugh! how I hate it!

In the very centre are the cliffs beyond the walls of this prison. Great cruel rocks rising from the sea, with a stretch of land at the top. Lying flat upon his face upon the highest rock, looking over into the hungry sea, is a man.

He is very handsome, with bright brown curling hair, and great blue eyes, and in his face is an expression of eager search—a look of terror.

Below him, holding to the rocks with torn, bleeding hands, and held by his clothing from the fearful fall that seems imminent, is a second man, quite out of the other's sight, under the overhanging shelf of rock. You can see that this one has fallen over the cliff, caught by his clothing to the ragged rocks, and then swinging under, holds on by his hands, quite hidden from the one above him.

And this second man is my uncle Gordon.

There is the same cruel face, narrow forehead, small mouth, large dark eyes. He is aged—now has long white hair and a heavy white beard, but the man in the

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picture is uncle Gordon, for all that, when he was young, and, in a cruel, stern fashion, handsome.

In his pictured face, too, is the same expression of malignant triumph I have seen there hundreds of times when he sat looking at the picture.

In one corner of this charming work of art, under the crest of an incoming wave, is the name, Gordon Willoughby, and a date twenty-five years old this year.

And this brings me to my adventure. It has been fearfully close and hot all day, and three or four hours ago I took my broad brimmed hat and went to the beach. I don't know why I walked to the cliffs, hating them as I do, but I did. I stood looking up at them from the beach, when I saw a man coming over the path leading to the sea, on top of the rocks. I do not often see people out there without scampering home, feeling how odd I look. But to-day I stood still and looked at the man, till he stopped and then lay flat on his face and peeped over the rocks, with his face as white as death.

I knew he would, because his face was the face in the picture, with brown curly hair and big blue eyes.

Yet the picture is twenty-five years old, and this man was younger than that, I am sure, though I do not see so many faces that I am a good judge of age.

I wonder what he looked for? I wonder if he has been twenty-five years seeking it? It gives me a feeling of wild terror to think of the picture, and then of the man I saw to-day.

He rose to his feet again while I stood staring at him, as I am sure no young heroine in any of my fifty novels would have stared, and then he sauntered off by the way he had come. How was I to guess he was coming down the path winding round the rocks to the beach? I never imagined he was near me till a voice close at my side said: "Pardon me!" and I turned to face him. I wonder what colour my face was? Green, I should judge by his cry of horror.

"You are ill?" he cried.

"No," I answered. "You startled me. We seldom see strangers in this out-of-the-way place."

He looked at me with a strange sort of pity in his blue eyes. Then he said:

"Can you direct me to a house that was called, years ago, Hilton Hall?"

I shook my head.

"I never heard of it. You had better ask in the village."

"I have done so. They told me I could see from the cliffs on old stone house, with a high brick wall around it. I can barely trace this place for the dense growth of trees. But, pardon me again, you came from the iron gate set in that wall, so I ventured to speak to you."

"I never heard the place called Hilton Hall," I said, "and I lived there ten years."

"The village people told me a hermit lived there named Gordon."

"My uncle."

"Gordon," he said, as if the name was familiar in his mind. "Well it is a common name."

I was about to tell him the rest of the name, and then paused, with the same terror clutching my heart that had seized it when I first saw his face. I wondered why?

He talked to me after that of the sea, and the views to be sketched near us, of which I knew nothing, and then he left me.

But he gave me a card with his name upon it, and asked me mine. I have the card here. The name upon it is: "Francis Hilton, Weasels Club, London."

Will he come again? Is it joy or fear that makes my heart beat so heavily, my hands so cold? I wonder if my uncle would look at the living face as he looks at the pictured one? If he did I should expect him to spring upon Francis Hilton, and tear him to pieces.

* * * * *

While Editha Berri wrote diligently in her diary, finding some relief from the dreary monotony of life even in the recording of her "adventure," Francis Hilton was walking briskly to the village. In the hotel there, he wrote a letter, and this was its purport:

"Dear Mother,—I think I am on the right track, but I cannot write much news as yet. I went to-day to the cliffs, and I am sure I found the spot. I knelt down and crept along, peering over the edge as if after twenty-five years the sea would give up its dead, or the rocks tell their secret.

"It is wild hope we are chasing, but I am sure to-day those dying words were more than mere delirious raving. Yet my clue is still faint. But I will tell you what I have learned.

"First, that ten years ago Hilton Hall was purchased by a man whose name is Gordon. That is curious—is it not? Gordon!

"Since he has lived there, no one outside of his household has ever seen his face. He sends his orders for food and necessaries to the city beyond here by a grocer's man, who has never been inside the gate, he tells me, but takes a written paper from an old woman and gives her the goods. You can easily understand that there are many stories told of this recluse. One man who was hired to unpack the books and furniture when the hermit took possession, describes him as a very old man, with white hair and beard and large black eyes that glare like a wolf's.

"To-day I was on the cliffs, and looking down upon the beach, saw a girl gazing up at me with an intentness that was very curious. She was the strangest figure I ever saw in my life, and I went down to look at her more closely.

"The path round the rocks brought me to her side unperceived, as she was facing the cliffs, and it came out upon the beach some little distance beyond them. She was still looking up at them—so absorbed, she did not hear me—and I could not help staring at her dress.

"It consisted of a long straight robe of brown cotton cloth, belted with a morocco belt, without collar, cuffs or one shred of trimming. Her hair, that is intensely black, hung in two heavy braids far below her waist, and upon her head was a broad-brimmed hat of the coarsest straw. Her shoes were of heavy leather, such as boys wear.

"When I spoke to her she grew so ghastly white that I was afraid she would faint, and in her eyes was a wild terror. Why should she be so afraid?

"After a little time she regained her natural colour, though she was constrained and shy. But she is gloriously beautiful. Think of beauty that could triumph over her hideous dress!

"With eyes as black as coals—large, deep eyes, fringed by long, silky black lashes—and with hair dark as a starless midnight, she has a skin as fair as your own, mother—and I never saw one more purely blonde than yours. There was no colour in her cheeks to-day, but I fancy they can bloom like twin roses. Her features are not small, but classic in regularity, and her mouth is simply perfect, grave or smiling, to show the rows of pearls the dainty little lips cover. She is tall and slender, but very graceful, and her hands are of rare beauty.

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"Her name is Editha Berri, and she is niece to the mysterious Mr. Gordon, of Hilton Hall. Does that help you at all?

"To-morrow I shall try to gain admittance to this enchanted castle that holds so fair a princess.

"In the meantime, mother, try to ascertain if he had a niece and if her name was Editha Berri."

There was more in the letter—chiefly the loving questions of a son to a dearly beloved mother.

Having sealed, directed and posted it, Francis Hilton strolled about the village, chatting with all who were so disposed, but adding little to his meagre stock of information about the recluse of Hilton Hall.

* * * * *

How many years may one live in a week? It is just a week since Frank Hilton came here, and when I sit and count the hours I have spent beside him they seem to cover more of my life than the whole nineteen years I had lived before he came.

Lived! No—no, existed, stagnated, fainted! I have only lived in this great, glorious week. Every day I have met him on the beach, in the shadow of the cliffs that hang over some strange mystery in his life and mine—a mystery I dare not yet touch, but which must be revealed. I know that; *I* feel it, but I dare not help to tear away the veil.

Every day he tries to enter here upon one pretext or another. Only to-day he told me he was born here—here in this room where I am writing, and he wanted to visit the spot, and I promised to ask my uncle's permission.

But I dare not! He will kill him for having the face he so hates—the face in the picture. I am so afraid of my uncle. He never has given me a kind word in all these weary ten years. Even the old hag who used to beat me called me "Honey" when she was good-natured. But my uncle rarely sees me, rarely speaks to me, and my name drops from his lips, cold and stern.

He has fed and sheltered me for ten years, so I suppose he does not actually hate me, and, indeed, he never glares at me as he does at that odious picture I hate worse than before since the blue-eyed man sprang to life.

I have an idea that my utterly hideous dress might possibly be replaced by something better, and yesterday I plucked up courage and asked my uncle if Anne might order for me a pretty dress or two.

He looked at me as if he would strike me in another minute, and cried:

"You are a pauper—you are a pauper! and you shall dress like one!"

I ran away frightened at his voice and those horrible glaring eyes, and I ran against Anne.

She must have heard, for she said: "Don't anger him like that again. And never ask a miser for more than he gives, or he may take even that away."

So he is a miser. Now, I think of it, I don't remember that I ever heard Anne say so many words at one time before. Are we growing talkative, I wonder?

Although I was so frightened yesterday I made another descent upon my uncle this morning.

Oh, how my heart trembles to think of it!

I went into the study, and after saying "Good-morning!" and getting no answer, said:

"Uncle Gordon, was this house ever called Hilton Hall?"

Ugh! It makes me shiver to think now of the dead-white ghastly face lifted from his book. But his eyes were like coals of fire.

"Why do you ask?" he said, and then I was most thankful that I had prepared the first lie I ever told.

"Because I found this in the attic," I said, and put before him an old primer, upon whose first page was written: "Francis Hilton, Hilton Hall."

It was only the reason I gave for asking that was a lie. I actually did find the primer, having made many voyages of exploration in the house during the last week.

But my lie was nothing to his, for, regaining his self-possession with a jerk, he said:

"I only bought the house ten years ago. I know nothing of its former possessors."

He bent his head over the book again, and I was creeping out, thankful to escape so easily, when he called me back.

"Editha!"

I never heard this name softly spoken by my uncle, but it was hard then as iron smiting iron.

I looked into his face—set and stern, white as death.

"I thought your life would preclude all vulgar curiosity," he said; "but since that distinguishing characteristic of your sex has risen in your heart, understand that it must be fed elsewhere. Any prying into my life, my house, my affairs, will be followed by your instant dismissal from all of them. I took you from the gutter, and I can thrust you back again. Go!"

And he would do it. A week ago I do not think the threat would have moved me. There is at least freedom in the gutter. Beggars get a kind word sometimes with the penny charity offers. But here what is mine but mere food and shelter? I do not think there is a beggar alive who would give her clothes for mine.

Yet I cling to this life now, to this home, because the beach lies beyond, and on the beach I meet Frank. He tells me to call him so. And never were softer syllables than his voice makes of the name Editha.

The world that was so sombre and gloomy to me is bright and glad when he speaks. I wonder if love has come into my life, as it came to the heroines of my fifty novels! Every one of the fifty had a lover. But then every one of the fifty was wonderfully beautiful, and the rich one had trailing silks and glossy satins to wear, while even the very poorest had dainty calicoes and white ruffles and ribbons.

* * * * *

"Dear Mother,—Will you think I am utterly mad if I beg of you to join me here and to see the woman I love, and try to throw some sunshine upon her life? I write it again—the woman I love—or, rather, the poor, friendless, desolate child I long to gather into my arms and comfort.

"I dare to write so to you, knowing your firm belief that marriage is a sacred meeting of heart in which no worldly consideration should be allowed to enter. We have talked of it so often, mother, that I know when I tell you I love Editha Berri that you will come to me and tell me how to win her.

"Just one little week has taught me the sweet life lesson and to her it has come as well. She is not versed in any art that will hide her heart from me, and she loves me. When you hear the story of her life you will not wonder. I beg of you to come and snatch her from it.

"It did not seem to me honourable to try to steal her away till to-day, when she told me her uncle had called her a pauper. If she is a pauper I *will* take her away. In the village she is considered the heiress of a miser's hoarded wealth. But her uncle himself informed her of her poverty.

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"Are you not glad we are rich enough to choose a pauper, if we wish, to share our home? I am. I will not tell you more until you come. Let me know when to meet you."

* * * * *

Three days more—oh, what dreadful days! All the mystery is explained, but at what a cost! Did I murder my uncle? I am alone in this room for the last time. To-morrow I am to be taken away to light, happiness and love. Let me write the story of these last three days.

To-day is Friday. It was on Tuesday I wrote here last. Wednesday was a glorious summer day, with the sunshine flooding everything, turning the sea to molten gold. I went out early, and Frank was on the beach.

In one hour I had ceased to envy my fifty heroines their silks and satins, their fine homes, balls and pleasures. For Frank loves me—loves me! In spite of my hideous dress, my want of early attraction, he loves me. He asked me to be his wife, and, strangest of all, told me his mother was coming to the village hotel on that same day to welcome me. Only yesterday he wrote to her, and to-day she telegraphed him to meet her by the train that comes to H—— at three o'clock.

So we arranged our plans. I was to tell my uncle that I was going to marry Frank Hilton, and walk straight out of the house to the beach, where at five o'clock Frank would be waiting to take me to his mother. He told me she would love me for his sake, and I thought my heart would break for joy.

I came home, determined not to speak to my uncle until just before five o'clock, so that if he was furious I would run away direct to Frank.

I opened the chest where I kept my possessions. In it I found one change of underclothing. I wonder what one of my fifty heroines would say to that. My one woollen dress and a big shawl Anne packed away in camphor. About my neck is a ribbon with my mother's wedding ring on it. Nobody gave me any more of her property and I was too young to take it. I do not know who gave me this.

I tied up the change of clothes in a towel, and wandered about the house till near five o'clock.

Then I went to the study. My uncle was reading—he always is reading. He took no notice of me till I mustered my courage and said: "Uncle Gordon!"

"Well!" he said harshly, as he was always harsh to me.

"I am going away."

His lips curled to an ugly sneer.

"Back to your native gutters?" he said.

"No; I am going to be married."

"To whom, may I ask? The grocer's boy is, I believe, the only person who has ever seen you."

"I am going to marry Frank Hilton," I said, and shrank back.

But he did not strike me; he did not speak. His eyes took their most frightful glare, rolled back in his head, and he gave a cry, such as I never heard, and fell headlong upon the floor.

Anne came to my screams—my terrible screams—and we lifted him and took him to the bedroom.

"Run to the gate! Scream to anyone passing to send a doctor!" Anne said.

I flew across the long path to the gate. Frank was there waiting for me. I only screamed: "Bring a doctor—my uncle is dying!" and then dashed back again, after seeing Frank start on a run towards the village.

Anne had loosened my uncle's collar and had tried to force brandy between his lips, but he was rigid and growing cold.

He was dead—quite dead. The doctor came, and before dark Frank came with his mother, but nobody could help my uncle.

Mrs. Hilton took me to my room—the room where Frank was born—but I know nothing of the long night. In the morning I saw a face like an angel's bending over me, with blue eyes like Frank's, and golden hair. Soft hands caressed me, a soft voice whispered: "My poor child!"

But I could not take comfort yet. I struggled to my feet and asked for Frank.

When the sweet woman had dressed me she led me downstairs to where Frank waited. I took his hand and dragged him to the study, where I tore open the shutters to let the sunlight fall upon the horrible picture.

"What does all this mean?" I screamed. "You are there—my uncle is there! Your name killed him! What does it all mean?"

"Is that your uncle?" Mrs. Hilton asked, pointing with a shaking hand to the man under the cliff.

"Yes. He was old—old, white-headed—but that is his face, and his name is there, under the waves."

Frank looked at the name.

"'Gordon Willoughby,'" he read in a strangely solemn voice.

"Thank God!" his mother exclaimed, falling into his arms and bursting into tears.

I stood quivering with excitement until Frank had quieted his mother. I was not accustomed to attention, to being considered, so I did not suffer as a more petty girl might have done. But I thought my brain would have burst.

After a time, that seemed a week to me, Frank put his mother in my uncle's armchair and turned to me.

"Editha," he said gently, "twenty-five years ago my mother was married here—in Hilton Hall, and Gordon Willoughby, who had loved her, swore to be revenged upon my father, who had won the love he coveted. In those days, dear, this was a splendid home, and my father one of the richest and most popular men in the country. Just one week after the wedding day my father came to his home, white and awe-stricken, and from that hour was a changed man. Mother has told me how he became silent and sad where he had been the bright spirit of his circle of friends. He seemed ever to carry the weight of some terrible secret with him, and rarely left his home.

"Even my birth, one year later, did not rouse him from his gloom, and when I was but two years old he left his home and went abroad. We led a wandering life after that, until my father died, two years ago, in Paris. Upon his deathbed he told the secret that had stricken all gladness from his life.

"Upon that evening, a week after his wedding day, he met Gordon Willoughby upon the cliffs. They quarrelled, led on by the man who had vowed vengeance against Alice Hilton's husband, and from words they came to blows, and fought for life upon the cliff, each trying to throw the other over. At last my father shook himself free, and as he did so, pushed Gordon Willoughby over the cliff. From that hour he carried a murderer's inferno in his heart. And that was Gordon Willoughby's revenge," said Frank, pointing to the picture; "that he hid his miraculous escape from the man who would have given him all his wealth, his very life, to have known the truth.

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"But upon his deathbed some unexplained intuition told my father what to-day proves to be true.

"He told me the story and implored me to come here to Hilton Hall and try to gain some clue to the truth. Again and again he told me he believed Gordon Willoughby lived, though he could not give one reason for such a belief."

That was the story, in many more words than I have written down.

We went to the room where my uncle's still figure rested. The undertaker's men had shaved off his ragged white beard, had cut his hair close, and his face was calm and peaceful. It was the face under the cliffs in the picture, and Mrs. Hilton recognised it at once as the face of her old lover, who had so faithfully kept his bitter vow of revenge.

I think we all breathed more freely when we were quite at the other end of the house in a great vacant parlour, to which Frank and Anne carried some chairs and a lounge. Then how strange it was to be coaxed to lie down, to be covered with a soft shawl and caressed and petted, to have Mrs. Hilton kiss me, and her tender voice call me "daughter!"

Oh, could I mourn for the unloved dead, then?

In the afternoon a dressmaker came from the village and Mrs. Hilton ordered my mourning. A little later a lawyer came from London, having been sent for by Frank, after he found his address in my uncle's notebook, an hour after he died.

I was not called upon for much questioning, but the doctor and Anne were summoned to answer all inquiries about my uncle.

Then the lawyer told me my uncle had long, long before willed me his property, and that I was very rich—even richer than Frank.

So we are to live here, though the house will be made cheerful. In a year Frank and I are to be married, and Mrs. Hilton will teach me all things for his wife to know. She will take me to-morrow to her own home in London, and Frank will remain here till the workmen know what is to be done to renovate the house, and make it a home, not a prison. This morning, just before the funeral, we took the picture down from the wall, cut it into fine shreds, and burnt it in the open grate.

All my uncle's papers are packed up and taken to the lawyer's office till we are ready to send for them, so we can leave here when we will.

* * * * *

Just a year ago I left Hilton Hall. To-day I came back again, Frank's wife. I look in the long mirror in my dressing-room and wonder if the tall, stylish woman reflected there can be the brown-clad girl who ate her heart out here for ten years. Frank assures me it is the same, and I gladly believe him. W. A. Holcomb.

WITHIN AN INCH OF ETERNITY.

If you have ever paid any attention to American affairs, the name of Auburn cannot be unfamiliar; it has about the same significance in the United States as Portland has in England. You must not imagine Auburn as an immense gloomy prison, a single large building, but rather a whole colony of criminals, a metropolis of the miserable outcasts of society. Inclosed by enormous walls, which rise menacingly to a considerable height above the plain, are a great number of single structures, houses which contain the cells of the prisoners, the residences of the warders, barracks, hospitals, and workshops, all desolate and dreary, with here and there a bit of turf, a row of trees, a bed of flowers, like an innocent memory of childhood among the evil thoughts of a criminal.

Circumstances, which I will not weary you by recounting, had led me, after completing my education, to America, and after a brief time in New York I found myself prison-surgeon in Auburn, which, as perhaps you know, is in the State of New York.

I had charge of a part of the prison which contained the worst criminals, men, or rather human hyenas, to whom blood had ceased to be a very special liquid, as Mephistopheles terms it. Two, who were condemned to lifelong imprisonment in the institution, and were distinguished among the others by great bodily strength, craftiness and intelligence, had, in consequence of repeated bold and cunning attempts to escape, been placed under more rigid oversight than the rest.

I had incurred their special hate because I had once caused the discovery of several iron tools, which—Heaven knows how obtained—they had concealed under their clothing, and on another occasion discovered that they were shamming, when, on the plea of illness, they desired to be placed in the hospital, probably because they hoped to find the conditions there more favourable for their plans of escape. The scoundrels were separated and heavily chained, but nevertheless one morning one, and a few days later the other, vanished, chains and all, without leaving a trace. About a fortnight afterwards I went to Cayuga Bridge on some private business.

It was noon when I reached the end of my ride; and I gazed with delight at the sunlit landscape before my eyes. Cayuga Lake, one of those which, with Lake Erie, form the network of inland lakes in New York, lay before me in its peculiar loveliness. Between rugged, rocky shores, confronting each other like sullen foes, the long, narrow sheet of silver, extended its clear surface as if striving to reconcile the two enemies, who had stared defiantly at each other for centuries. Across the lake, which is about forty miles long, and, at this point, a mile wide, the railway trains run on an immense wooden bridge, a marvel of American enterprise, which has a station at Cayuga Bridge, an insignificant village.

My business was soon completed, and towards evening I set out on my way home. Are you familiar with the pleasure of a ride on a summer evening? Cayuga Bridge is surrounded by extensive oak forests, through which I had to ride a considerable distance. The huge, lofty trunks cast long shadows, and the tops rustled so softly that one rather felt than heard them. As I passed beneath these woodland giants, sweet memories of my far-off home stole into my heart.

Absorbed in thought, I loosened the bridle of my horse, which trotted slowly forward. I admired the bewitching blending of colours produced by the rays of the setting

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sun as they shone through the dense, dark green foliage, and seemed to kindle the edges of the leaves.

Suddenly I was aroused from my dreams by a rustling in the underbrush on both sides of the road. I seized my pistol and turned quickly, but at the same moment received a terrible blow, which deprived me of my senses. True, I opened my eyes once more and fancied I saw indistinctly, as in a dream, one of the escaped criminals bending over me, then darkness shrouded my mind.

It must have been late at night when consciousness returned. I opened my eyes and saw above me in the deep blue sky a radiant moon. A dull, heavy sensation in the back of my head made me try to put my hand on the aching spot, but I discovered that I was bound hand and foot. Gradually I collected my thoughts, remembered the attack by highwaymen, and a terrible foreboding, which made my heart stop beating, darted through my brain. I felt that I was laid across two sharp parallel projections, which pressed against me most painfully, and, listening intently, I heard far below me a faint splashing noise. There was no doubt—I was lying across the rails of the Cayuga bridge, bound, unable to move, with the terrible, certain prospect of being cut into three pieces by the next train.

I almost lost consciousness again. But I soon recovered my composure. Then I tugged desperately at my bonds till they almost cut my muscles, shrieked, and at last cried like a child. I tried to roll myself into a different position, and remembered that an incautious movement would hurl me into the silent waves of the Cayuga—bound hand and foot, motionless as a stone.

I shuddered and lay still. But not long. The light of the large, to me, fearfully, brilliant moon, the splashing of the water below, the wind blowing softly, then the deathlike silence again, rarely interrupted even by the distant note of a bird—all became unendurable and inspired me with unspeakable terror. And the rails! The rails! My senses tortured me. I could not escape them. The wooden beams of the bridge trembled almost imperceptibly from the washing of the water. I imagine I felt the approach of the train and my hair bristled; the wind sighed a little louder, I fancied I heard the dull panting of the engine, and my heart stood still, only to throb the next instant with such dreadful speed that the pulsations were almost audible.

There are some things which are totally incomprehensible to me; one of them is how I survived that night. One thought stood distinctly before my mind. I must endeavour to work myself into another position—if possible, get into the space between the rails—if I was not, perhaps, the next moment, to become the victim of the most agonising death.

And I succeeded! I strained every muscle, every sinew to the point of breaking. I writhed, I twisted, I panted, my head seemed bursting, and, after tremendous exertion, which appeared to me to last an eternity, though perhaps it was only moments, I found myself in the hollow between the rails.

Was I safe? I had not time to consider or rejoice in my new hope, for all my vital powers were concentrated in the single sense of hearing. In the far distance I distinguished, at first vaguely, then more and more distinctly, the regular, monotonous, dull noise which is produced by the engine of a moving locomotive. The awful silence of the night merged minute by minute into the still more awful, confused jarring sounds, the rattling and groaning, rumbling and panting of the locomotive, which was rushing forward at a mad speed. A thousand feet more, five hundred—and all the terrors of the infernal regions assailed me, but not a muscle moved; I lay as if turned to stone. I tried to shriek, but did not even hear my own voice; how should it reach those on the train?

Now, for an indefinite brief space of time, I fancied that I saw a bright light, a blast of hot air fanned me, then suddenly darkness shrouded me. I heard a thundering roar as though the very heavens were falling.

Close, very close, barely an inch above, the monster dashed over me—I was safe. Still half unconscious, I heard a deafening rumbling and clattering, and saw shadowy masses flit by; there was another moment of mortal dread—the hook of a chain which hung lower than the rest caught me, dragged me along a few feet, and finally tore a large piece from the breast of my coat, releasing me, then every object danced around me, the moon, the bridge, and the high bank whirled in a giddy maze above and below me and my senses failed.

When I regained my consciousness I found myself in my bed, with familiar faces bending over me. To make the story short, I had been picked up the morning after that terrible night by a signalman, recognised, and taken to Auburn. A violent fever kept me for a fortnight within the shadow of death, but my strong constitution conquered. When, after my recovery, I looked in the glass for the first time, I saw what traces those moments had left upon me.

ARNOLD REES.

DO YOU WANT YOUR PHOTOGRAPH ENLARGED?

Or possibly that of some much-beloved relative no longer with you?

In this case send the photograph, inclosing a postal order for 6s. 6d., to "Pearson's Weekly" Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., not later than June 21st. If an acknowledgement is desired, an addressed post-card must be provided.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS WILL BE RETURNED UNSOILED.

The following are letters which have been received in connection with these photographic enlargements:

Mr. E. J. Hallam, of 17, Godwin Road, Forest Gate, E., writes:

I beg to acknowledge with thanks the safe receipt of the enlargement of my child's photograph. I think it is only right that I should express my great satisfaction and admiration of the same. It is not only a marvellous likeness, but a really splendid production. Considering the small price you have charged, I must say I consider you have made a handsome gift to all those who availed themselves of your offer.

Mr. O. G. Quinn-Jones, writing from 2, St. Catherine's Terrace, Tenby, says:

I am exceedingly obliged to you for the very handsome enlargement of the portrait of my deceased brother, which I received this morning. It is, in fact, more lifelike than the original, and the most satisfactory work of the kind that I have ever met with.

Mr. W. G. R. Williams, Master Gunner, R.A., Dover Castle, writes:

I acknowledge with very much pleasure and an abundance of thanks, the magnificent pictures of my late father and mother, which came to hand safely on Friday last. They are "streets" beyond what I expected, being in every respect speaking likenesses. I have shown them to a number of friends who are unanimous in their praise.

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After Ten Years

A Fortune Teller's Prediction

In 1869, at the end of the Empire, a young man was seated in a kind of attic in the Rue Verte, Faubourg St. Honoré. In front of him, seated upon a chair, was the mistress of this dwelling. She was a woman advanced in years, with the real face of a sorceress. In truth she was a "chiromancienne," the name given to those who foretell future events by reading the hands of the clients who come to consult them.

The young man was holding out his right hand, and the old woman had the air of reading it as a banker reads his notes. Suddenly she stopped in her examination, looked her visitor in the eyes, and said, with an air of inspiration:

"Listen! Listen to me and answer!"

"I will, madam!"

"You are a widower?"

"It is true."

"Since six months?"

"Yes, madam."

"You are rich."

"I have enough."

"A million and a half francs."

"That is the amount of my fortune."

"You have no connections in the world."

"None at all."

"Very well, monsieur. Take heed of what I counsel you—never marry again."

Here the visitor could not help changing colour; ordinarily pale, he became pallid. Not marry again! Up to this hour, since the loss of his wife, he had never thought of such a thing; but he was still young—just entering his thirtieth year. What could prevent his forming a second alliance if he chose to, later on? Perhaps the interdiction so brusquely formulated by the sorceress irritated some secret desire hitherto hidden in the depths of his heart. He was seized with a feeling of revolt.

"Not marry again!" he said quickly. "Why not?"

"Because the lines of your hand oppose it, monsieur."

"But if I take no notice of it, madam?"

"If you do not obey the oracle," replied she, speaking as if she were at a loss for words, "well, *great misfortune will come to you!*"

He was not satisfied, and demanded that she should tell him more, at the same time showing her a piece of gold.

"That would be thrown away," the chiromancienne said. "If you were to offer me half your fortune I could not tell you another syllable."

She rose from her chair as if to let him understand that the *séance* was at an end. In spite of himself he was compelled to take his dismissal. Throwing a louis on the mantelpiece, he bowed and descended the stairs.

"Well, it is strange," said he, as soon as he found himself in the street again. "It is impossible to get that old woman out of my head, with her threats and her enigmatical talk; but it was equally ridiculous for one of my age and situation to come and ask an old woman about future events. It was a folly that can only be ascribed to a weak mind."

As he reached the Avenue Martigny, which leads to the Champs Elysées, feeling himself still a little shaken, he stopped a moment to regain coolness and to find an excuse for his folly in consulting the sorceress at all. He found it in things that he had heard when recently attending a soirée at the Turkish ambassador's. Among the guests there were several grand dames who had put all sorts of extravagances in fashion. Superstitious to excess, these pretty simpletons professed to believe in nothing, yet in truth had faith in everything. Each of them wore as a watch-charm a little pitchfork of coral to keep off the evil eye, and regulated their conduct by what they learnt from drawing the cards. They had spoken of the chiromancienne of the Rue Verte, and that she was endowed with the gift of second sight. One day the Empress herself and the Princess Metternich had gone to consult her, and returned with their heads full of the most astonishing things she had told them.

From that time on her reputation was established. She, the sorceress of the Faubourg St. Honoré, was as famous as Hone the spiritualist.

Now, in the run of success everybody in the fashionable world wanted to consult her, if only for five minutes. Our young man had but followed the example of the grand dames.

Tony Berthier was tall, thin, and decidedly *distingué*

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in appearance. He was also rich, and could walk side by side with the most elegant of that epoch, renowned for its ostentatious style of living and dress.

After the death of his wife—she left no children—he had to begin his youth, so to speak, when he had nearly reached the autumn of life.

But he was an idler, and seeing the world to keep from dying of *ennui* was almost a duty with him. In leaving him a great fortune, his parents, following the French fashion, thought it would be derogatory to his position for him to learn any kind of business. What need has a millionaire of doing anything? It is enough that he takes the trouble to exist. So Berthier went home to breakfast. He fared sumptuously, as a rich bachelor usually does.

Several of the daily journals were lying under his hand. To help him to pass the time he unfolded them one after another. They all related to what was passing in the gilded world of Paris, and the world of Paris at the end of the Second Empire was filled with scandal.

At the house of the nobility even you could hear of nothing but husbands who left their wives before the marriage was fairly concluded; of lovers demanding that ties be annulled; of engagements broken. It was "clear the decks," and a general helter-skelter on all sides.

Berthier saw a young woman, seated alone.

"Ah, well," said Berthier, sipping his pineapple-ice; "this is a pretty time we are living in. The old sorceress was right. Instead of grumbling at her I should send her a diamond as a present, with my thanks. If I should not marry again she has rendered me a service."

He lit a cigar and started for a walk on the boulevards, going first to the Madeleine, then to Montmartre, and then to the Boulevard des Italiens, and back again to the Madeleine. He was like a squirrel in a cage.

Restless and bored, he tried the club, and from there to the Bouffes Parisiens, where they were giving an opera by Offenbach. But there he yawned, and determined, as a last resort, to go to bed.

Finally he arrived at the conclusion that he was bored, because the general situation was too tame.

"To-day resembles yesterday," he said; "to-morrow will resemble to-day. If we only had some stirring event!"

One day at the club he was talking in this way when someone—a journalist—brusquely interrupted him.

"You want a stirring event, monsieur? Wait, you will have it!"

"What is it you say?" said Berthier.

"Nothing is plainer, monsieur. The war is coming. We are going to measure our strength with Prussia. I have foreseen it for ten months. But what does it matter? It will do us no harm to have a little fight with our neighbours. You will see," said the journalist as he went away, "war with Prussia."

Tony Berthier, like all the young Frenchmen of his time, saw it from a distance as only another name for victory, accompanied by rolling drums and sounding trumpets, decorated with flags, laurels, and flowers. He heard already the chime of bells and the songs of triumph. Alas! how soon these illusions were dissipated! The bravest soldiers in the world cannot conquer when their commanders are both treacherous and incompetent, and beautiful Paris—the capital of the world—surrendered.

* * *

Berthier was brave, and he loved his country. He went to the Loire and joined a company of riflemen as soon as the invader came.

He did his duty nobly, and was many times decorated for his bravery before the enemy. At last, in an engagement at Mars, he was severely wounded and sent to the hospital. It was months after this that he returned to Paris. The terrible days of the Commune had come. The city was filled with blood, tears, and grief. All the horrors of the civil war were before him, and he could still see the smoke of the guns that Frenchmen had trained upon Frenchmen.

In the midst of this tempest of ferocious passions he could not understand which side was right—which was wrong.

"Let them blame me if they like," said Berthier. "I will have nothing to do with it. What have I to do with their quarrels? I am rich, I am well established. I will be an egotist and take my ease."

This was in May. One afternoon in July of the same year, Berthier deserted the Madeleine—too many political

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He blew out his brains.

memories assailed him there—and went to smoke his cigar in the Tuileries Garden.

Berthier lounged along the Alley of Leaves, came to the Place de la Concorde, descended the steps, and in sheer idleness wandered round the grand fountain.

Just then Berthier saw a young woman, seated, alone and thoughtful, before the statue of Meleagre.

She was tall, fair, and elegantly dressed, and appeared to be about thirty years of age. Her costume was somewhat severe in style, as was proper for a person well born, after the great disasters of the past year. On her black hat was a tuft of purple plumes and a veil of black lace, and she had black gloves and parasol. Berthier approached a little nearer, the better to see her face. She was very handsome; her face was pale, but lighted by a pair of great blue eyes.

A few steps off he found the old woman who rented the chairs.

"Do you know that young lady?" he asked.

"No, monsieur; I know that she comes to the garden nearly every day at the same hour, and I have been told that she is a widow, which is evident from her dress."

"Widow?" said the idler; "widows are always the most fascinating of women."

He threw a silver piece into the hand of the old woman to pay her for her information, and continued his walk. At the end of twenty minutes he returned to the terrace, hoping to see the beautiful unknown again, but she had disappeared.

"I will return to-morrow," thought he.

The next day, as soon as he had finished breakfast Berthier hurried to the walk near the statue of Meleagre.

"She is there," he cried, his heart beating with joy.

"Monsieur!" cried the chair-renter, running towards him, quickened by the hope of another piece of silver, "I have information of the beautiful lady—shall I tell you?"

"Yes, speak," replied Berthier.

"Well, monsieur, she is about thirty years old, and in a modest but independent position. Her name is Clelia Puyremy, and she is the widow of a colonel of the Commune of last May. Her husband, having been taken with arms in his hands, was shot here on this terrace in front of that statue, and she comes here every day to pass a half hour at the same place."

"Hold, madam! Here is money for you!" said Berthier, and he hid himself among the trees.

Thus the "stirring event" for which he had longed, mingled with his love of adventure.

This beautiful woman was the widow of a colonel of the insurrectionists. He no longer wondered at the purple plumes and the black veil. But why did she come every day to visit the spot where her husband was shot?

"It is evident she loved the man. Can I hope to make her love me?" he asked himself.

Then he remembered the episode of the Rue Verte, and the prediction and warning of the sorceress. But although he resolved to think no more of his present folly, he came every day to the garden of the Tuileries in spite of himself, and each time he saw Clelia Puyremy and loved her more and more.

One day he could contain himself no longer; he managed to speak to her through the old chair-renter, and a friendly acquaintance began between them.

Tony Berthier had at last found a cure for his *ennui*. A little later they were married at the church of St. Roch, the widow having obtained from the official bureau a certificate of the death of her husband.

It was said there never was a happier union than that of Berthier and Clelia. In 1877 a little girl was born.

Three years rolled by; 1880 came, and in July of that year the armistice. Summer and autumn passed, and one morning at the beginning of winter, Clelia was alone, arranging her music. Suddenly a servant entered and said a poorly dressed man asked to speak to Madame.

"Let him enter," said she carelessly.

The visitor was Colonel Puyremy, her first husband. Contrary to all that had been told, he had not been shot, but had been thrown upon the pontoons of Brest, and afterwards carried to New Caledonia. Profiting by the armistice he had returned, and was there to claim his wife. He did not want money—he wanted his wife.

Clelia did not try to struggle with the fatality which had so cruelly met her. She left her little girl and a note of explanation for Berthier, and went away for ever. She fulfiled what she thought to be her duty.

That day Berthier was hunting in the environs of Paris. On his return he found the note. He read it, and, in a moment of despair, blew out his brains.

The prediction of the sorceress had been verified!

Le Vier.

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AN INDIAN DRUG

By Huan Mee,

Author of "The Czar's Diamond," "In Masquerade," "Alan Lindow's Wife," "Philip St. Voullé's Understudy," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

Estlin Godfry brings from India three bottles of deadly poison, with which his friend, Walter Shenfield, a chemist, experiments on a rabbit. Estlin's uncle, Joseph Monro, is about to marry Ethel Sedwicke, and should he do so, Estlin will no longer come into the estate. On the wedding morning, Monro is found dead in his room. Estlin goes to London and consults an old friend, Sidney Larrance. At the inquest it transpires that Godfry will benefit by his uncle's death more than anyone else.

CHAPTER VI.

The Verdict of the Jury.

There was a very crowded court upon the re-opening of the inquiry into the cause of the death of Mr. Joseph Monro, and some considerable excitement was evinced when the first witness was called and answered to his name, Zarto Slazar, and a tall dark Oriental entered the box.

The Coroner: "You are an Indian doctor who has had much experience in native poisons?"

Witness: "Yes, sir."

The Coroner: "You have examined the poisons contained in the bottles handed to you by the chemist, Shenfield?"

Witness: "Yes, sir."

The Coroner: "What do you find them to be?"

Witness: "I find them to be the most deadly poison known in India—a drug that is instantaneously fatal."

The Coroner: "There is no antidote?"

Witness: "Naturally."

The Coroner: "What are the conditions found in the body of an individual who has died from this poison?"

Witness: "They are identical with the state in which Dr. Hill has informed me he found the deceased."

The Coroner: "Is the poison a common one in India?"

Witness: "No, sir, the secret of its manufacture is only known amongst a certain set of fakirs."

The Coroner: "It would be difficult to obtain?"

Witness: "Exceedingly, because one would have to discover the sect itself and then find an unscrupulous man who would be willing to sell it."

The Coroner: "In your opinion then the late Mr. Monro met his death from taking poison similar to that inclosed in the bottles that Mr. Estlin Godfry admits having brought home from India?"

Witness: "I am certain of it."

The Coroner: "Have you experimented with the contents of the other two bottles?"

Witness: "Yes, sir."

The Coroner: "With what result?"

Witness: "I tried a single drop from one bottle upon a rabbit, and a drop from the other upon a dog, and in both cases the animals died instantly, without apparent pain."

The Coroner: "Thank you, that will do."

Estlin Godfry was then recalled.

The Coroner: "How many bottles of this poison did you bring home from India?"

Estlin: "Three."

The Coroner: "Can you prove that you only purchased three?"

Estlin: "No."

The Coroner: "Can anyone?"

Estlin: "No."

The Coroner: "You are aware that it is a very important matter that you should endeavour to do so?"

Estlin: "I am aware of that, but I can only give you my word."

The Coroner: "You cannot account for any possible way by which your uncle could have obtained possession of any portion of the poison however small?"

Estlin: "No, sir, he did not even know that I had it in my possession, and when I took the bottles from my private desk to take them to Mr. Shenfield the three seals were unbroken."

The Coroner: "Can you give us any reason why you purchased such a deadly drug?"

Estlin: "No, sir, unless it was a mere matter of curiosity."

The Coroner: "What did you pay for them?"

Estlin: "I gave the fakir a ring that I wore which had taken his fancy."

The Coroner: "Why did you take them to Mr. Shenfield on that Tuesday evening?"

Estlin: "Simply that being interested in poisons he might test them."

The Coroner: "Did he test the poison at your suggestion?"

Estlin: "Yes." (Sensation.)

The Coroner: "Why did you propose that he should close the shop?"

Estlin: "That we might not be interrupted."

The Coroner: "Now, Mr. Godfry, I ask you on your oath, was there any cause of disagreement between your uncle and yourself upon any point?"

Estlin: "You mean in regard to his wedding?"

The Coroner: "I mean upon any point."

Estlin hesitated for a moment and then in the straightforward manner which had characterised him throughout the inquiry, replied:

"Two years ago we had a very slight misunderstanding."

The Coroner: "That was before you went to India?"

Estlin: "Yes, sir."

The Coroner: "Was it the cause of your leaving England?"

Estlin: "Partly."

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The Coroner: "What was the nature of the quarrel?"

Estlin: "It was not a quarrel—it was a difference of opinion."

The Coroner: "I must ask you to be more explicit."

Estlin: "I was desirous of marrying a lady to whom my uncle objected, and he gave me an opportunity of visiting India in order to forget the connection."

The Coroner: "Then this disagreement was the real cause of your visit to India?"

Estlin: "No. It had been a long cherished desire."

The Coroner: "By the death of your uncle before the marriage, and therefore before signing his new will, the whole of his property is, I believe, by a former will left to you?"

Estlin: "That is so."

The Coroner: "You were aware of this?"

Estlin: "Yes."

The Coroner: "You are therefore a greater gainer by his death now than you would have been later?"

Estlin: "In mere money I derive more, but the whole of the money is as nothing against the loss of a man who had been more than a father to me."

The Coroner: "Thank you, I do not think I need trouble you further."

The only other witnesses called were the servants of the household, who testified to the general goodfellowship which had existed between the uncle and the nephew.

The Coroner then proceeded to address the jury upon the whole case. He said that in all his experience a more distressing event it had never been his duty to inquire into, but he trusted that what at the present appeared to be a terrible mystery would eventually be cleared up. The jury had to consider, in the light of the whole of the evidence that had been laid before them, how the deceased met his death, and that resolved itself into one of three alternatives, either suicide, misadventure, or murder. To his mind, any idea of suicide was not tenable, for the few events of the unhappy day seemed to point to a man at peace with himself and all the world, easy in his financial circumstances, happy in his approaching matrimonial relations, and with a bright and prosperous future stretching out before him. Was that the kind of man to commit suicide?

And further, if he had desired to take his own life, would he have chosen a time like that and so plunged into grief and mourning the woman whom they must believe he had fondly loved? Death by misadventure seemed less likely still. There was no poison found in the wine in the study, the doctor testified to the death having been instantaneous, and yet they found no receptacle that could have contained poison and a most searching investigation of the contents of the desk had revealed nothing but private papers, cheque books, and such like possessions of a business man. The tourist tickets for the honeymoon journey were lying ready upon the table and a guide-book to the English Lakes was also found. There was nothing therefore to point to misadventure.

The only alternative then, was the black and ugly one of murder. Yet they could find no trace of any enemy. Mr. Monro had been a man esteemed and respected by all who knew him, open-handed and generous to a fault. In considering the probability of murder they had to look for motive, and motives generally divided itself into one of two things—revenge, or money. He could not think it was revenge for where could revenge arise when a man had no enemies? Then it must have been a murder for the most sordid of all reasons, for money.

He did not desire to lead the jury in any way, but simply to coldly recapitulate the facts. Those facts disposed in his mind of any theory of suicide or accident, and left only murder, foul murder. The evidence pointing towards murder was unfortunately very strong. They must bear in mind that by the new will Mr. Monro had made, and which he intended signing the very day that the drug of the poisoner took his life, diverted the bulk of his fortune into another channel than that of the former will.

They must also bear in mind that there had been a disagreement between himself and his nephew, which was the cause, or partly the cause, of the latter leaving for India, and perhaps, while still smarting under what he construed the injustice of his uncle's action, he purchased the fatal drug. Who should say? Then they find Mr. Monro himself proposed entering into a matrimonial alliance that would of necessity lessen the fortune to be left to the young man, and, for all he knew, rear up an heir to usurp his place.

The evidence of Shenfield, the chemist, told them of the visit of Mr. Godfry on the evening before the day fixed for the wedding, and of the experiment to prove the virulence of the poison, and the fatal results upon the rabbit. They had heard the opinions entertained by Mr. Godfry as regarded suicide, poisons and antidotes, and that gentleman could but give them his uncorroborated word that he brought home only three sealed bottles of poison. That Mr. Monro died from the effects of such a poison they had the sworn testimony of the Indian expert.

Those were the facts that presented themselves to his mind. Far be it from him to attempt to sway the jury but he felt it was his duty to dwell upon this series of circumstantial facts and then leave to their careful judgment and consideration the whole of this perplexing mystery. If they found that there was reasonable ground to assume Mr. Monro might have died from misadventure they would, of course, return that verdict. Painful as it might be, they would equally return a verdict of suicide if they could find anything to justify that view, but if after considering everything they were forced to believe that Mr. Monro met his death by the hand of another, then in the exercise of the duty that they were summoned to perform, they would as Englishmen do that duty and return a verdict accordingly.

The jury, after a brief deliberation, returned a verdict of "Wilful murder against Estlin Godfry," who, amid a scene of the wildest excitement, was committed on the Coroner's warrant to take his trial at the next assizes.

CHAPTER VII.

Hoping against Hope.

Estlin Godfry was committed for trial for the wilful murder of his uncle, Joseph Monro, and there were not wanting many who thought him guilty. It would not be saying too much to assert that nine-tenths of the population of Maythorn had already decided upon his guilt, and were equally certain as to what the result of the trial would be, but against them all there was the one staunch, true friend, who, with indefatigable energy, worked for the defence.

The best legal talent available was secured on behalf of the unfortunate young man, and from morning to night, and far into the night itself, Sidney Larrance laboured and thought. Confident in the innocence of his friend, he was equally conscious of the damning chain of circumstantial evidence that had wound itself around him. No intuition seemed possible in such a case as this. The facts marshalled themselves in such regular order, from the quarrel of the uncle and nephew two years ago to the sudden and awful death of the former on his wedding-day, that it seemed as though fate itself had decided that Estlin Godfry's race was run, and that what promised to have been a long life and a brilliant career was to end like the life of a malefactor, in the cold grey light of an October morning, with the tolling bell for a man not yet dead, the scaffold and the rope.

Heaven, it was terrible! To think that an honest man should be done to death, hanged like a dog, because there was no one to prove he was not a murderer. The voices of the crowd prated of the "circumstantial evidence." Yes, circumstantial, purely circumstantial, but yet how awfully it all fitted, fitted with horrible accuracy, and the learned counsel for the prosecution would take the pieces as a child

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takes a dissected puzzle, and join them together until the whole thing was complete, and then——

Haggard and worried, Larrance sits alone wondering and pondering over this mystery, and never getting on much further towards the solution. The more he considered it, the deeper he probed it, the more it pointed to the conclusion that the crowd had adopted already—Guilt! Guilt! Guilt! Estlin Godfry was doomed. There was no hope of a miracle to clear the man who Larrance knew was innocent, no hope, no hope.

For the twentieth time since he commenced to try and discover some clue to the mystery, Larrance goes down to the village and talks the matter over with Shenfield, who is as anxious as Larrance himself to discover some means that may save Godfry, for he cannot disguise from his mind that the evidence forced from him at the inquest must have gone a long way towards influencing the jury to return the verdict that they had.

"You are certain," said Larrance, "that no one could possibly have tampered with the bottles after you locked them up?"

"Only too certain," the other mournfully exclaims.

"And the third bottle was utterly destroyed?"

"Utterly; the night was chilly and I had a rather larger fire than usual. That bottle and the paper with which I wiped up the spilt poison I myself threw behind the fire. It is useless to thresh this out again and again, there must have been some other poison somewhere."

"But where? You do not suspect Godfry?"

"No, Heaven forbid, but this poison was the poison that killed Monro, therefore there must have been more."

"Ah!" the exclamation from Larrance is so sudden that Shenfield is startled.

"What is it?"

"I have a gleam of hope yet."

"Speak man, speak."

"What became of the poisoned animal? Could anyone have obtained the body and extracted sufficient poison from it?"

"Impossible, no one except Godfry and myself knew of the experiment, and Monro was dead the next afternoon, besides I buried the rabbit myself."

"Did you look if the ground had been disturbed?"

"No, of course not, the idea never occurred to me, and besides the quantity used was so minute it would have been impossible for anyone to have extracted sufficient poison from the body."

"You remember the spot?"

"Perfectly."

"Let us see."

They adjourned to the far end of Shenfield's garden, he pointed out the spot, and after a few turns of the spade, the box containing the rabbit was unearthed. It had never been disturbed, and the last shred of hope in the minds of both vanished.

Larrance then sought out the Indian doctor, who, courteous and obliging, could give no different view to that he had already formed. No other opinion than that he had sworn to in the Court, Joseph Monro had died from an Indian drug, the very drug that Estlin Godfry had brought to England.

For hours Larrance pored over books and records of circumstantial trials, read and re-read until the very printed lines swam before him. Then through and through the evidence of the witnesses at the inquest and ever ended with the same result. It all pointed to one man only, his friend, his innocent friend Estlin.

An interview with the bereaved lady who was to have been Mrs. Monro only strengthened his confidence in the innocence of Estlin. Miss Sedwicke shared in the belief, and her sorrow at the untimely death of Joseph Monro was intensified by the horrible suspicion attaching to the man, who, as she said, would to her have ever retained the position he had held in Merton House, the adopted son of Joseph Monro.

No, there was no light, not a glimmer, not a spark; it was an awful mystery, a dense impenetrable blackness with but one possible end. The dock, the condemned cell, the sudden, awful, ignominious death!

They were powerless, utterly, completely powerless. Waiting as one waited for an annihilating blow, knowing that it was certain, that unless something should spring as from the very stones of the streets themselves and speak, there was no chance for Estlin.

Never was there a harder worker in a forlorn case than Sidney Larrance, never did man worry and strive and fret his heart out as he did but all to no avail. The days went on. How they seemed to fly. The dawn came and the sunset followed and yet no nearer hope. Never! never! and daily the trial drew closer.

And Estlin, what of his frame of mind. At first the horror of the whole thing seemed as a dream, from which he would awaken, but as each day went on and nothing ever lessened for a single moment the fearful accusation hanging over him, he grew pale and thin and weary. He could not sleep, but paced up and down half the night through until sheer weariness of body closed his heavy eyelids for a space and then the terror of his dreams awoke him to living wretchedness once more.

Could it be possible, he asked himself a hundred times a day, that fate would let this wild chain of coincidences, this mesh of circumstantial facts, rob a man of his life, throw a net around him that his fellow creatures would believe him guilty of the crimes of murder? murder for money. Horrible, impossible! No, no, they could not think that, no human heart could believe that he would slay his benefactor and yet the world's records of crimes had shown still greater villainies. But Providence, Providence would intervene and prove him innocent; surely, surely it would not let an innocent man suffer. Suffer, and such a penalty. The last penalty of the laws of man. Death!

No, something would arise, yes, something, something. He would sleep and hope.

That was his safety, innocence, and so he dozes to sleep and then the cruel dreams tear his brain once more, and he wakes shaking and trembling as the words seem to ring in his ears. "Hope not, hope not, the innocent have suffered before now. Thy name, too, is written on the scroll of Death."

CHAPTER VIII.

Guilty or Not Guilty?

It is the last day of the trial. The day upon which the result of five days' continuous hearing of evidence will be made known to the world, and Estlin Godfry let loose a free and innocent man, or, in the terrible language of the sentence of the law, be condemned to be "hanged by the neck until he is dead."

Within the densely crowded Court suppressed excitement is at its height. Every inch of space is packed with a throng which holds its breath and strains every nerve so that not a single word shall be lost; while in the midst stands the prisoner, pale but collected, meeting his sentence before it is pronounced. He feels there is no escape, that he is doomed.

For five days the brilliant counsel for the Crown has examined and cross-examined, brought forward this witness and that, and bound a chain of damning guilt about the prisoner, every link solid, and ringing with truth, every link welded within another until there can be no escape, the perfect circle is formed. Day after day for five days has the council for the defence endeavoured without avail to find a flaw in even one of the links, only to be driven back by the inflexible action of the Crown, which "desires not to win a victory and mete out vengeance for the sake of public opinion, but simply to press the full weight of a crime upon the one who has committed it." Now the whole case is over, and as the shadows deepen the Judge arranges his

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robes about him, turns over the leaves of his notes, and leans forward to commence his summing-up.

There is a death-like hush, every eye turned to the man who is about to address them, every mind wondering what form this summing-up will take. In the popular language, will it be "for" or "against" the prisoner, the murderer! They already call him "the murderer." After all, a trial is a waste of time when an impartial British public can settle a case almost without troubling to hear the evidence. The Judge looks towards the jury, and commences; his first words, in the view of the public, settling the fate of the prisoner.

"Gentlemen," he says, "I am no upholder of a colourless summing-up. It is my duty to lay the complex details of this case before you, and without endeavouring in any way to sway your impartial judgment, yet to do so in a manner that you may find yourselves assisted in forming a clear opinion as to the value of the evidence which has been placed before you. Before all things I would urge you not to be led away by questions which do not immediately bear upon the case, but to judge the facts coldly and clearly according to the laws of the country and influenced in no respect by sentimental or emotional evidence. Though in the eyes of the world, in the emotions of the body, it may be infinitely more horrible for a man to take the life of one who has always been his benefactor, yet in the eyes of the law the question of murder is not affected by any such influences, and I would ask you, in dealing with this grave charge, to cast from you any thought of the relationship or connection between the man before you and Joseph Monro.

"Then again do not allow any anxiety to find the wretch who could have been so heartless as to wreak his vengeance upon such a day as the murder occurred, bear in the slightest degree with you, for it is better that many murderers should for ever escape earthly justice than that one innocent man should be done to death."

The judge pauses and a murmur of suppressed applause breaks the silence for a moment, and all eyes are turned towards Estlin Godfry who, with his hand resting upon the ledge of the dock, follows breathlessly every movement in the Court.

"The prisoner, Estlin Godfry," the Judge continues, "is charged with the murder of his uncle upon the morning of the Wednesday the nineteenth of August last by means of a poison quite unknown in England, and instantaneous in its effect. He was the last to leave his uncle, and the time that elapsed between his rejoining his friends below and the finding of the body of the deceased gentleman was, as far as can be ascertained, barely five minutes, so that the horrible suddenness of the calamity clearly pointed to a poison the effect of which was to cause death like a lightning stroke. A poison of this kind, we are informed by an expert upon this subject, is absolutely unknown in England, although reputed to be more or less common in Eastern countries. How such a poison was brought to this town has been fully placed before you by witnesses for the prosecution and admitted by the defence.

"The prisoner himself has stated that he purchased three bottles of this most virulent drug in India, and brought them back to England. Two of those bottles you have had placed before you, and the third, on the oath of a witness who was called for the prosecution, and not the defence, was utterly destroyed. It is for you, in the impartial carrying out of your duties, to come to a conclusion as to whether those three bottles were all that the prisoner brought home, or whether there were others, for unfortunately the defence has been unable to call a single witness to prove that those three bottles were all the prisoner ever possessed.

"That is a matter you must weigh fully in your minds, leaning neither to vengeance or to 'giving a man the benefit of the doubt,' for I would urge you as men of honour, to act only upon what you feel to be the facts, and not to assume or deduce upon so solemn a matter as life and death. There can be absolutely no doubt that the murdered man was killed by poison either from one of the two bottles before you, from the bottle that was destroyed, unfortunately by an avowed friend of the prisoner, or from a fourth, the existence of which can never be proved, for experts have given you full evidence that such a death could only be caused by the administration of that one drug. You must also decide whether in your honest opinion it is the act of an innocent man, and moreover one not particularly interested in scientific studies to be in possession of such a deadly poison.

"But again I would urge you not to be hasty in your conclusions, as a man may purchase a revolver or a rifle without meditating a crime, so too may a man be in possession of a deadlier weapon without evil intent. As for the motive to the crime, if we accept the view that one man will kill another for the greed of money, and unfortunately the annals of crime show only too many examples that such is the case, then a motive is put boldly and clearly before you by the prosecution. Had Joseph Monro lived another hour, the prospective income of the prisoner would have been reduced from ten thousand pounds a year to one. A great motive to many, but against this you have to consider one important fact that the prisoner, although he might have the love of money common to all mankind, was in no great straits for it. He had no financial difficulties to negotiate, no overwhelming burden of debt to conceal, no disgrace to fear. He lived well within his means, had a large sum to his credit, and if he committed the crime could only have done so through a cold-blooded desire for potential affluence. A great and terrible deed for the most sordid motive.

"Much has been made by the prosecution of a quarrel which occurred two years ago between the prisoner and his uncle. A quarrel in connection with a youthful entanglement which was the cause of the prisoner leaving England. This quarrel is frankly confessed by the defence, and treated as a matter long past and forgotten. It is for you to decide, gentlemen, whether this is so, or whether this quarrel had long rankled and become at last the incentive to the crime.

"A very large number of witnesses have been called by the prosecution, who have proved beyond doubt the fact that the prisoner was the last to leave his uncle, only a few moments before his death, that he had the poison in his possession, and that he was well aware of the provisions of his uncle's new and old wills, and all those facts are admitted by the defence.

"Experts' opinion, and even that of the prisoner's friend, Walter Shenfield, the chemist, place beyond doubt the fact that Joseph Monro was killed by this identical poison. That is practically the case for the prosecution, the possession of an almost unknown poison, which caused the death of the deceased man, and a strong motive for his death existing at that time. The defence on the other hand has scarcely called a witness, and certainly none other than to prove the cordial relations existing between the two men, and the financial position of the younger, and, contenting themselves with a slight cross-examination, have relied upon a series of cold arguments and statements. As a defence in such a case it seems perhaps peculiar, but admitting as they do the possession of the poison, then unless they could prove that the prisoner only purchased the three bottles, the line of defence adopted is the only course open, and although an absence of witnesses need not necessarily mean a weak case, it must be regarded as calamitous that nothing could be brought forward against the evidence of the prosecution beyond a series of deductions as to the probable action of a murderer under a given set of circumstances.

"The main point laid before you in the course of the defence is, that had the prisoner contemplated the committal of the deed he would not have taken poison, which no one was aware he had in his possession, and shown it to a friend; and the natural assumption is that unless he had some very special reason for doing so he would never have

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taken them from his room, and certainly never shown them to a living soul.

"Then again, the defence says, had he contemplated such a deed, would he not have carried it out when he was alone with his uncle, and not waited until discovery was almost certain? He was always with his uncle, the poison was to his hand. You are asked to discover why he waited until such a moment. Was it, as the Crown suggests, that it was only on that very day, in the private interview with his uncle, only then that he discovered his true position? And did he, as the prosecution suggests again, make a point of showing the poison in his possession as a daring plan of escaping suspicion? A plan daring even unto madness. It is for you, gentlemen, in the righteous and honourable discharge of your duties, to discover whether these rash, one might almost say insane, acts bear testimony for or against the prisoner.

"Whether the doings of Estlin Godfry in connection with this drug indicate criminal stupidity, an abnormally far-seeing vision, which even considered the probability of this trial, or an innocence of all intent to harm, are questions which can only be solved by you, and upon your decision rests the grave and fearful question of life and death. Then we have the opinion of the faculty that a death so sudden, so fearful, would have been put down at once by a physician as heart failure if it had not been for the fact that Doctor Hill, the medical attendant of the deceased man, whose evidence you have heard, was absolutely certain that such a death could not have taken place. But, gentlemen, was the prisoner unaware of that? Was it upon that idea that he based his action? Was it upon that assumption that he was so open in his doings in connection with the poison? Does this explain actions which have been characterised as insane?"

The Judge closes his book and leans back in his seat.

(To be concluded.)

RESULT OF THE BRAIN GYMNASIUM.

OF the hundreds of papers sent in for THE BRAIN GYMNASIUM, which closed on May the 25th, not one was wholly correct. Mr. R. M. Shipstone, of 126, Oakfield Road, Penge, S.E., headed the list with a total of 9½, and to him, therefore, has a prize of One Guinea been sent. Nine shillings has been added to the remaining prize of One Guinea, and this thirty shillings has been divided equally amongst the next ten competitors. The following are their names and addresses:

T. Gowland, 12, Tavistock Road, Harlesden, N.W.
L. W. Judd, 2, Alfred Villas, Stanton Road, Barnes.
F. Bessant, 15, Eton Place, Falmouth.
E. T. Goodson, 91, High Street, Standish, near Wigan.
T. Mason, Hawkhead Terrace, 31, Seedhill Road, Paisley, N.B.
G. M. Hollis, 47, Dartmouth Park Hill, N.W.
Miss Way, Curraghmore, Shanklin, Isle of Wight.
J. R. Trail Hill, 3, Merchant Street, Peterhead, N.B.
A. H. Hamilton, 43, Dalmeny Road, Tufnell Park, N.
Mrs. Witson, 482, Duke Street, Glasgow.

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RESULT OF PICTURE PUZZLE COMPETITION.

No. 6.

54	79	7	84	25	72	33	38
35	14	18	57	49	86	41	39
31	5	55	73	8	80	50	43
13	62	10	66	36	23	28	68
3	53	88	82	19	42	40	6
45	59	71	63	48	15	19	22
78	70	34	30	46	90	83	11
51	16	87	98	17	12	26	74
24	2	37	81	29	77	44	56
58	20	75	9	09	4	08	27
76	12	1	47	64	69	32	52

A VERY large proportion of those readers who entered for the Picture Puzzle Competition (No. 6) announced in *Short Stories* for May 23rd succeeded in putting the squares together correctly. It has been decided to award the prize of £10 to the competitor who forwarded the neatest correct solution, and the fortunate person is L. Shead, 19, St. Thomas' Road, Finsbury Park, N.

The twenty readers whose names appear below have each been sent a gold-plated pencil-case as a consolation prize for the correctness and neatness of their attempt:

Miss A. Hughes, 86, Fairbridge Road, Upper Holloway, N.
E. E. Wilson, 37, York Road, Walthamstow, Essex.
A. E. Bowles, 35, Weston Street, Bradford.
J. St. Clair, 29, Shelgate Road, Wandsworth Common.
T. O. Perring, "Glencoe," 38, Brunswick Square, Herne Bay.
Mrs. E. Davis, 13, Barbican Terrace, Barnstable, North Devon.
M. G. Morgan, 2, Tan Terrace, Berriew Street, Welshpool, Montgomeryshire.
Miss E. Mee, Burlish House, Bendley Road, Stourport, Worcestershire.
Bertram Newcombe, Green Bank, Penketh, near Warrington.
A. Grigg, 23, Church Street, Edgware Road.
Mrs. Baird, 9, Bowhill Terrace, Edinburgh.
F. White, 1, Ludgate Hill, London.
M. Mungall, 1, Adelaide Street, Helensburgh.
J. Baker, 4, Argyle Street, Darwen, Lancashire.
J. Cooper, 50, Queen Street, Peterhead.
Miss Capner, 42, Frances Road, Handsworth Birmingham.
W. Binmore, The Cottage, Lyncombe, Torquay, Devon.
S. Small, 18, High Street, Cardiff.
J. Cross, 34, Bentley Road, Kingsland Road.
M. Macnab, Perthshire Club, George Street, Edinburgh.

OWING TO PRESSURE ON OUR SPACE THIS WEEK WE ARE UNABLE TO FIND ROOM FOR THE KEY TO THE BRAIN GYMNASIUM, THE RESULT OF WHICH IS ANNOUNCED ON COLUMN ONE. IT WILL APPEAR NEXT WEEK.

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No. 6.—NEW SERIES.

TWO PRIZES OF A GUINEA EACH.

BELOW will be found the sixth batch of ten problems in the new series of THE BRAIN GYMNASIUM. Two prizes of a Guinea each are offered weekly to those competitors who answer correctly the greatest number of these problems.

Consolation Prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor.

RULES:

1. All solutions to be written clearly on one sheet of paper.
2. Do not write the questions; simply put the numbers and the answer against each.
3. Each set to contain the £100 coupon (found on second page of cover) for the current week.
4. All attempts to be in by Monday, June 15th.
5. Mark your envelope "GYMNASIUM, NUMBER 6."

(51.) WORD SQUARE.

1. Stern.
2. A particular breed.
3. An image.
4. To improve.

(52.) The first letter in the word forming the solution to this problem is found in "sock" but not in "shoe," the second in "brown" but not in "blue," and the remainder as follows:

In "rum" but not in "whisky."
In "prim" but not in "frisky."
In "order" but not in "neat."
In "arms" but not in "feet."
In "nation" but not in "crowd."
In "conceit" but not in "proud."
In "iron" but not in "slack."
In "opening" but not in "crack."
In "plunder" but not in "loot."
In "shout" but not in "hoot."

(53.) If *A* commences to write with an ordinary pen at the rate of 90 letters a minute, and *B* commences to write with a fountain pen at 103 letters a minute exactly 5min. 50secs. afterwards, what time will elapse before *B* has completed the same number of letters as *A*?

(54.) The following, when reconstructed, forms a readable sentence: The enemy of a broken ambulance abandoned by two waggons, halfway at an heap of spoils and its wheel the caisson are thrown up three dying waggons and the muskets and horses; for a hill at a crest two more weary knapsacks more men; with the foot off, or fearful and hill away

(55.) If H=7,
P=½,
O=2,
L=59,
What word on this page has the greatest numerical value?

(56.) MIXED VERSE.

Het oolepd si a uqderdaup 'stath racilypnilp riha,
It's wetvel ot rontefeu cinseh goln nda yevr yearnl ruaseq.
It merdins em fo a daly's fumf that's lobstered pu no geps,
It's revy englhty hirs'swe nda vitabrdebea gels.

(57.) The words defined below, when placed one on the other will form an hour glass, and the centre letters, read downwards, will spell a synonym for "settlement."

1. A botanical expression.
2. Burial.
3. Terrible.
4. Swindle.
5. Writing fluid.
6. G.
7. A beverage.
8. Full of lumps.
9. Deadly.
10. Totalling.
11. In a frightful manner.

(58.) DOUBLE ACROSTIC.

The initials read downwards
And finals read upwards,
Spell a word signifying,
"Particular stress of voice."

1. A Roman knight.
2. Plain clothes.
3. Sanctimonious.
4. A wild beast.

(59.) Make an anagram on the following sentence:
GYMNASTICS ARE GOOD.

(60.) How many (1) k's and (2) f's are there on this page.

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Curious Experiments

IN

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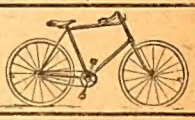

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